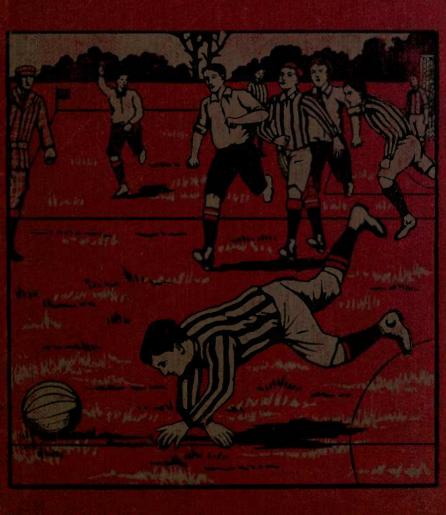
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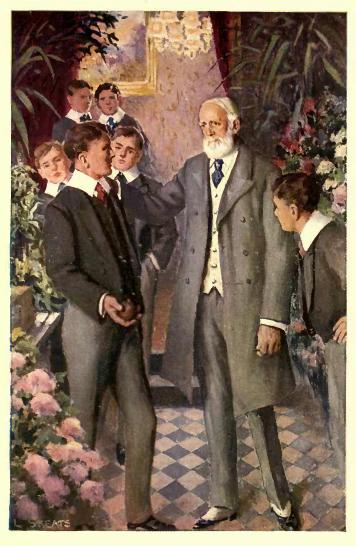






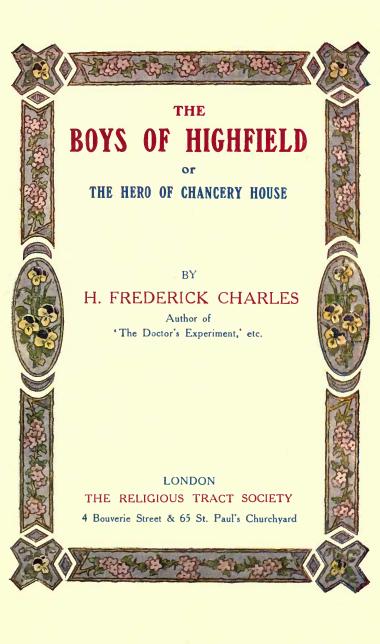


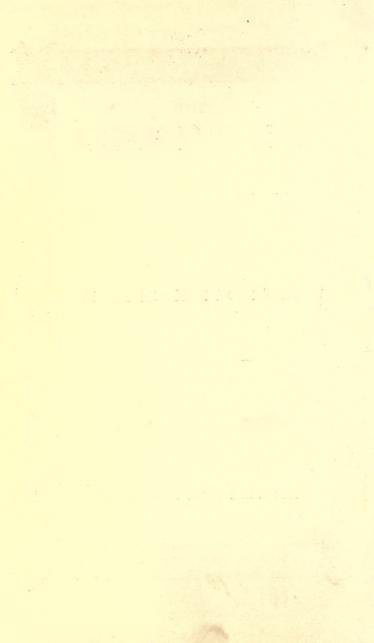




'I SHALL KEEP IT, SIR, TO REMIND ME OF MY OWN STUPID FOLLY.'

[See page 160.





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# CONTENTS.

CHAP.						PAGE
I.	THE CHANCERY FIELD, .					. 7
11.	HERMIT BLYTH,					. 19
III.	A FRIENDLY TALK,		. 1			. 30
IV.	ALEC'S FIRST READING, .				•	. 41
v.	THE READING CONTINUED,					. 51
VI.	MORE STRANGE ADVENTURES,			,		. 63
VII.	BROKEN BONES,					. 78
VIII.	А ПЕТО,					. 87
IX.	OPEN CONFESSION,					. 100
x.	CLEMENT BRAND MEETS A R	IVAL,				. 106
XI.	THE TIDE TURNS,					. 116
XII.	PHILIP ASSUMES A NEW CHA	RACT	ER,			. 126
XIII.	THE LAST READING, .					. 136
VIV	THE SECDET OUT					149





# THE BOYS OF HIGHFIELD.

# CHAPTER I.

THE CHANCERY FIELD.

HE Highfield Football Club had finished its Saturday's game, but the members lingered longer than usual in the field. The club was composed of lads from the various schools in Highfield, and Saturday being an early day with them, they used the half-holiday for cricket matches in

summer, and during the winter months for playing foot-ball in the old 'Chancery field.'

To-day there was something unusual going on, for although it was now dusk, the boys remained talking together as if some important point had to be settled, which was both difficult and disagreeable.

Presently a police sergeant appeared at the gate, and, opening it, walked directly towards the spot where the boys were assembled.

As soon as the boys saw him coming, several whispered to Clement Brand, 'Now, Brand! you talk to him;' and Clement stepped forward as the spokesman of the club, to meet the representative of the law. Tall for his age, which was seventeen, Clement looked almost a young man, and, to judge from his bearing, he regarded himself as such. 'What is it, sergeant?' he inquired, in a pleasant voice, which betrayed no anxiety as to the interview. The police sergeant was a big man with a good-humoured face, and he knew every member of the club as well as they knew him.

'Which of you young gentlemen threw a cricket ball into Mr. Blyth's conservatory just now?' he inquired of Clement.

- 'Do you mean old Hermit Blyth?' asked Clement, smiling.
- 'I believe you young gentlemen call him by that name,' replied the officer good-humouredly; 'but, whatever his name may be, he won't have his beautiful conservatory injured without knowing the reason why. He has been round to the station to say he will give five

pounds for the name of the person that threw the ball.'

'Do you wish any of us to earn the money, sergeant?' asked Clement, laughing.

'Well, sir, I thought I'd step round and mention what had taken place, for I never heard of any of you young gentlemen doing mischief before, and I told Mr. Blyth so, but he seemed to think differently. He is a very determined gentleman, I assure you, and he declares he will find out who it was that did the mischief.'

'Why should he accuse us, sergeant?'

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

'He has his own opinions, sir; but, in any case, if you take a friend's advice you will let Mr. Blyth alone—he is not a gentlemen to be trifled with,' he answered.

'Thank you, sergeant,' said Clement, 'you are a brick. Three cheers for the sergeant!' and the boys cheered lustily, much to the sergeant's amusement, for he laughed and turned to go away, feeling that there was no chance just then for more than the friendly words of warning he had spoken.

When he had gone the boys gathered round young Brand.

'I should not at all wonder if old Blyth did offer five pounds reward,' said Alec Verrinder, who was Clement's fast friend, and captain of the team which played against Clement's.

- 'Whoever threw that ball had better make a clean breast of it,' Clement said.
  - 'To you, of course!' added Alec, laughing.
- 'Certainly to me,' said Clement, with mock seriousness; and the boys round him laughed at the idea as something very amusing.
- 'Suppose old Blyth were to offer that reward!' observed Alec, with a little anxiety.
- 'Well! Is there a fellow here who would be bought over by the old Hermit?' asked Clement,
  - 'Why ?'
  - 'Because I shall buy him over now.'
- 'Thank you. We don't want your money or his!' was the prompt reply. The bare idea of any member of the club being bought over was too degrading to be received otherwise than with scorn.

Nevertheless, the sergeant's visit had created a feeling of uneasiness in the minds of some of the boys; and although they were ready to bear martyrdom, if necessary, rather than divulge the club secret, there was something decidedly unpleasant in the fact that Mr. Blyth had been to the police-station, and that he was determined to discover the offender.

This Mr. Blyth was an intruder, in the eyes of the football club. The old Chancery field belonged to the old Chancery house, which stood with its face looking towards the market town of Highfield, but whose long gardens reached down to the cricket field itself. From

a time so remote that it would puzzle one to calculate it exactly, the old house had stood empty, and bleak, and sad, with just enough mystery about it to make people -especially the boys-regard it with interest. course they said it was haunted. All sorts of queer stories were afloat respecting it, and the latest of all was that Mr. Blyth had become possessed of it for nothing, on condition that he would sleep in it for a certain period; because no one within the memory of the oldest club member had been known to spend a night within its musty walls. The fruit gardens had been for years common property, and the large vegetable garden had almost lost its identity altogether, and become part of the cricket field. Mr. Blyth had recently erected a high wall, which had restored the gardens to their original size, but seriously interfered with the football games. The field was in dispute at present, so that Mr. Blyth could not interfere with the boys; but it was understood that if he obtained possession the club would have to look elsewhere for a field for their amusements. Then, this Mr. Blyth was rather an eccentric old man, and he had a still more eccentric old housekeeper, who, the boys declared, must have been the original from which all the wooden women in the Noah's Arks are made. She was old enough to be his grandmother, and so sharp upon any of the boys when she met them, that they would gladly have shown their resentment—only they were afraid. Altogether, the feeling of jealousy in the minds

of the boys was enough to make them regard every action of their opponent with suspicion, and they only wanted an opportunity in order to show how bitterly they resented his intrusion. It might have been urged in his favour that he had on more than one occasion considered the boys, and shown a desire to be friendly towards them; but they followed their leader, Clement Brand, in this matter almost blindly, and refused to believe that anything could be said in his favour.

Alec Verrinder was the first to propose that they should leave the field. 'Who knows but that the old housekeeper may come round and have it out with us?' he said, putting his arm through that of his friend, and walking towards the gate.

The other boys speedily took their departure. There was nothing to keep them there, the moment that Clement Brand and Alec turned to go, and under the circumstances it was just as well that they should do so.

Once outside the gate, Clement Brand and Alec Verrinder directed their steps towards the town. 'Just come as far as the office,' said Alec; 'I want to see if the pater is still there.'

- 'You will soon be duly qualified to take your father's place, Verrinder,' said Clement.
  - 'Give me five years!'
  - 'Nonsense! How old are you now?'
  - 'Seventeen in May-seventeen and five, twenty-two.

When I'm two-and-twenty you may talk about my being fit for my father's work—not before.'

Clement smiled. 'Why, when I'm two-and-twenty I reckon on being in India, fully licensed to kill as many natives as may come under my surgical care.'

'You are quite equal to anything of that sort now, Clement,' said Alec, laughing, 'even though the patient were Hermit Blyth!'

'Do you think the old man will really make a fuss about his pane of glass?' inquired Clement.

'I do, most certainly. So would you if you were in his place.'

Clement was silent for a minute, then he asked, 'What should we do under the circumstances?'

'Suppose we consult my father?' Alec suggested; for they had that moment stopped before Mr. Verrinder's office, which had on its brass plate the announcement, 'Alexander Verrinder, Solicitor.' 'Shall I tell him you wish to have an interview?' Alec asked, laughing.

'If you like,' said the other; 'but I expect you will get advice enough for two—gratis! I'll stay here for you!'

Alec went into the office, and would have gone straight into his father's private room, but the clerk stopped him. 'Your father is engaged, Mr. Alec,' he said.

'Who is with him?' inquired Alec.

'Old Mr. Blyth, sir,' was the whispered answer.

Alec was out of the office as quick as thought.

'Come!' he said, grasping his companion's arm and

almost dragging him along, 'and don't ask a single question until I give you permission;' and they walked quickly down the street in silence.

'We may speak now,' said Alec, with a sigh of relief.

'What on earth is the matter?' asked Clement.

'Only this, Brand, that whilst you and I are speaking, old Blyth is closeted with my father—that's all!'

Clement Brand stopped, and looked at his friend. 'You are joking, Alec!'

'Come back and prove it to your own satisfaction,' said Alec, smiling, and turning again towards the office; but Clement refused this invitation, and said, 'On the contrary, I think we had both better get home as quickly as we can, and keep our own counsel. Good-night! I shall expect to have news from you in the morning;' and he disappeared down one of the side streets, whilst Alec went straight on towards his home, which was not more than seven minutes' walk from the office.

Saturday night was always a broken night at home, for it was not until nine o'clock that the family met. Alec's three brothers were sure to be away somewhere, and Mr. Verrinder seldom returned from his office before that hour, because of the many details that had to be dealt with, in order that the arrears of one week should not be a burden on the next. Mr. Verrinder's was an old and thriving practice, and he often said of late that there was work enough for all his sons if they chose to take to the profession. Alec and James were destined for it, but the others were too young as yet to have any decided tastes one way or the other. There were of course other solicitors in Highfield, which was a market town of nearly ten thousand inhabitants, but Mr. Verrinder had the cream of the business, and his character stood so high that his opinion was always sought eagerly in difficult or delicate cases. Work therefore had been growing on his hands so rapidly, that he often expressed himself anxious for the time when Alec would come to his assistance.

Alec went into the house, and, being tired, he flung himself down on the sofa in the parlour, where his mother was sitting by the fire knitting. 'Where are the boys, mother?' he inquired.

'Grace has taken them for a long country walk, but I expect them back to tea.'

'We had a splendid game of football, mother—the best of the season,' he said.

'No more scrapes, Alec?' said his mother, looking up from her work with a smile.

'Well, I think we have had our share, mother—old Blyth's conservatory has got smashed.'

Mrs. Verrinder looked distressed. 'How did that happen, Alec?'

- 'No one seems to know-'
- 'Or cares to tell,' suggested his mother.
- 'Well, it may be so; but broken it is, and I think

there will be a terrible row. We had a policeman in to inquire who broke it; but of course no one knew—or, as you say, cared to tell; and as I was coming home I looked in at the office, and found the old gentleman busy with my father.'

'But, Alec, these repeated accidents seem to show considerable ill-feeling on your side.'

'Mine, mother! I never damaged his property.'

'But you are on the side of those who do, and who persist in doing so.'

'I can't help the other fellows. If they throw stones and break things, you really can't blame me.'

'But I do blame you, Alec, because if it were not for your support the other fellows, as you call them, would not continue their unmanly attacks on a defenceless and worthy man.'

Alec coloured up. 'You are very severe, mother,' he said.

'Am I more severe than you would be under the circumstances, Alec? You know I speak to you as I would not speak to the other boys, because you are getting quite a man now, and your profession will be that of judging between right and wrong. Do you candidly think that you are quite just in your treatment of old Mr. Blyth?'

Mrs. Verrinder had wisely appealed to her son's sense of honour and justice. She knew that, however he might be led away by his companions, and especially by Clement Brand, he would never try to defend what was unjust and unmanly.

'Well, mother, I don't say that Mr. Blyth has been altogether fairly treated; but remember that I have not done the mischief, and you surely would not have me turn king's evidence?'

'I would have my boys stand up for justice and right under all circumstances, especially to those who are weaker than themselves. Mr. Blyth is an old man, and therefore entitled to respect from you boys, even though he were the aggressor, which, as you admit, he is not.'

Alec was silenced. He knew his mother was right, and that he had not made any effort to restrain Clement Brand. As to whether Clement would be restrained by him was another matter. He caught at the idea, however, and said, 'My dear mother, Brand wouldn't mind what I said about Mr. Blyth, even if I did stand up for the old man; nor would many of the others.'

'Did you ever try, Alec?'

'I can't say I did, mother. Oh! here is father.'

Alec felt his face redden as he rose from the sofa and met his father. 'You have had Mr. Blyth with you this afternoon?' he said laughingly.

'Yes, Alec, and upon a serious business.'

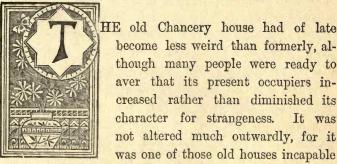
'Indeed, sir!' said Alec.

'I want to speak to you on the subject, Alec. Come

to the library.' And Alec followed his father with considerable forebodings as to the result of the interview. When it was ended no word was spoken by either father or son to indicate its character; but Mr. Verrinder learned from it much that was new to him about the football club, and he decided to act on the information the following Monday morning.

## CHAPTER II.

### HERMIT BLYTH.



of being made to look anything but what it really was —unless it were pulled down and rebuilt.

Mr. Verrinder had been familiar with the house all his life, but he regarded it with fresh interest as he approached it early on the following Monday morning. The house bore unmistakable evidence of having seen better days. Its old iron railings, fast rusting into a skeleton state, deserved more than a passing glance,

19

recalling as they did the days before Highfield possessed a gas-work, when a dim oil-lamp swung in the semi-circular bar which spanned the flight of steps leading to the hall door, and when link-boys extinguished their friendly torches in the quaint-looking apparatus placed for that purpose on either side.

Highfield had been steadily moving westward, and in its progress it had left the old house almost deserted by its companions, for whilst they had yielded to the current of change, and had been rebuilt or had disappeared altogether, it still preserved all its earliest characteristics.

Mr. Verrinder's knock was answered by the old housekeeper, who seemed so completely in keeping with the house that she too might be any age up to a hundred, so unlike modern servants was she in manners and dress. She wore a high cap with wide frilled borders, and her dainty cream-coloured shawl was folded across her breast in a very neat and becoming manner.

Her face was old and wrinkled, but her eye still shone clear and bright, and her voice was that of a much younger woman. She dropped Mr. Verrinder a curtsey, and, in answer to his inquiry if Mr. Blyth was at home, said he was in the library. She took his card and led the way into the room where her master was sitting.

'Oh, Mr. Verrinder, I'm glad to see you!' said Mr.

Blyth, rising from his chair. 'You are an early visitor;' and he extended his hand in a very friendly manner to his solicitor.

'My business is urgent, Mr. Blyth, and as it concerns your interest I have no apology to offer for disturbing you so early.'

'No apology is necessary, Mr. Verrinder. It gives me the utmost pleasure to see you. Pray be seated.'

Sitting down in a comfortable easy-chair near the fire, Mr. Verrinder's quick eye took in the whole room at a glance. A large and well-furnished library—busts and statuary of evident value, oil paintings, both old and new—evidently betokened a mind both cultured and refined. A book-rest attached to the chair in which the old gentleman was sitting held a book, which he had evidently been perusing when Mr. Verrinder entered.

'I am particularly glad that you interrupted me in my reading, Mr. Verrinder; for it will enable me to say what perhaps I might be afraid to confess some other time.'

'Indeed,' said the solicitor, with a good-humoured smile.

'I have been taking other counsel than yours, Mr. Verrinder—that is the simple fact;' and then he added, with a smile, 'but I must say it went to confirm your own opinion.' Seeing that the statement did not apparently offend Mr. Verrinder, he continued, 'Let me read you the opinion of this eminent counsellor;' and

he sat down in his chair and read from the book before him, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." What think you of that, sir?"

'I believe that if people would only accept the truth of that, and practise it, there would be very much less work for my brethren the lawyers.'

'Very true, Mr. Verrinder; and there is yet one other word of advice. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Now I sadly need to be at peace with mine; and between us we may be able, with God's blessing, to compass that desired end.'

'It was that object which brought me here this morning, Mr. Blyth.'

'I am delighted to hear it; and now I am all attention; you will find me an excellent listener.'

'I think, to begin with, there can be no doubt as to the quarter from whence the ball came which so seriously damaged your conservatory.'

'No shadow of doubt, Mr. Verrinder.'

'And further, there can be no reasonable doubt as to the ball having been thrown by one of the lads connected with the football club—I think we may assume that to be a fact.'

'We may, assuredly.'

'That being so, and wishing to prove that you are determined to discover the offender, if possible, you

intend having bills printed offering a reward of five pounds for the delinquent's name.'

'I have abandoned the idea of making the bills public,' said Mr. Blyth.

'I think you are perfectly right, sir. There is an unwritten code of honour among boys, which would make "splitting" almost as bad in their eyes as the offence itself is in yours; and, indeed, supposing it possible that you could succeed in getting the information, it would be no moral conquest over the lads themselves, which is what we both desire.'

'Exactly so, Mr. Verrinder. To get the lads to see that I am not quite so bad as they think me—that in fact I wish them well, and would be their friend if they would only permit me.'

'Is there any plan which suggests itself to your mind as at all likely to bring about such an end?'

'I have given the matter much consideration to-day, but I see no possible plan.'

'You will excuse the liberty I am taking, but it has occurred to me to ask you whether the gossip is true which says that you have had a very remarkable history?'

'Perfectly true, Mr. Verrinder.'

'And that the story of your life, if it were written, would be considered interesting?'

'Doubtless it would be so by many.'

'Then I would suggest that you should record just as

much of it as seems most attractive to yourself, and by that means obtain a hearing from the boys.'

'But, my good sir, you do not suppose they would bother their heads with anything that I wrote?' said Mr. Blyth, raising his eyebrows and smiling incredulously.

'That is my affair, Mr. Blyth. I will charge myself with the duty of obtaining proper attention for anything you may see fit to write; and I am much mistaken if it does not lead to a better understanding between the boys and yourself. My only anxiety now is to learn from you whether you would undertake such a work.'

Mr. Blyth shook his head, saying, 'Even if I were to do so, I feel sure it would have no good result, Mr. Verrinder.'

'If you are willing to make the attempt, I am willing to guarantee the result,' said Mr. Verrinder, smiling.

'That is all that any one could possibly say,' said Mr. Blyth; 'and I do not think I can hold out any longer under such a promise. I shall make a commencement this very day.'

'Good. I could neither ask nor expect more than that,' said the solicitor, with a smile; 'and if you will appoint a day I shall bring my son to see you.'

'Your son, Mr. Verrinder!'

'Yes, sir, my son Alec. The success of my project depends upon his co-operation. He must receive from your hands the manuscript, and you must extract a

promise from him that it shall be read to the boys.'

'I see. But suppose he refuses to have anything to say to it?'

'I cannot suppose what I know will not happen, Mr. Blyth.'

'Then I bow once more to your judgment, Mr. Verrinder, and I am entirely at your service.'

'When shall I bring my son to receive the first instalment of your narrative?'

'You may bring him to-morrow afternoon, sir.'

Then Mr. Verrinder detailed at length his plan by which he hoped to bring about a proper understanding. We need not dwell upon it now, especially as the plan itself will be made plain as we proceed.

Mr. Blyth entered into it with great zest. He had such complete confidence in Mr. Verrinder, that as soon as that gentleman expressed himself hopeful of success he became sanguine also.

The interview ended when Mr. Verrinder told his client how he wished him to receive Alec, and what was to be said about the manuscript. If Alec only knew how carefully everything was being planned for making him Mr. Blyth's advocate, he would have felt far from comfortable in the knowledge of it; but when his father told him that evening how he had been to Mr. Blyth's, and how the old gentleman much wished to see him, Alec's face grew crimson.

'To see me!' he exclaimed, in evident alarm; 'surely he does not think that I broke his conservatory window?'

'I don't know what his thoughts may be, but I promised to take you to see him to-morrow afternoon,' said his father.

Alec had to stand a considerable amount of brotherly fun at his own expense that evening, for as soon as it became known that Mr. Blyth had really expressed a wish to see him, both James and Robert found it impossible to resist the temptation of offering their advice, and at the tea-table the boys began it by telling Alec he looked very anxious. 'I don't feel so, then,' he said, laughing; 'my conscience is easy, and that is everything.'

'I know how I should feel if I had the prospect of such an interview,' said James; 'I wouldn't get much sleep to-night.'

'Possibly not; but then a guilty conscience needs no accuser; and if Mr. Blyth got hold of you I have no doubt you would feel very uncomfortable.'

'If Alec has nothing to conceal he has nothing to fear,' said Mr. Verrinder quietly.

'Well, so far as that goes, I'm not going to peach. I hope old Blyth won't ask me to do that, father.'

'Five pounds is not to be had every day, remember!'
Robert remarked, looking very seriously at his brother.

'You would have no chance as an informer, Bob,' said Alec. 'You are too much like a chief culprit.'

'There was always a family resemblance between you and me, Alec,' answered Robert smartly, much to the amusement of his brothers and sister.

Alec took all the jokes that were directed against him in perfect good humour; but the interview—which lay like a pall over the morrow—made him feel very uncomfortable whenever his mind turned to it, which it did every few minutes during the evening. He said to his father later on, 'What does Mr. Blyth really want of me, father?'

Mr. Verrinder was prepared for that question, for he had expected it.

'I think I can guess what he wants you for,' he answered. 'He wants you to help him.'

'To help him!' echoed Alec, in amazement. 'Me to help him!'

'I cannot see why you should express such surprise, Alec. There is nothing strange in people helping one another.'

'But Mr. Blyth wanting me to help him! What can he want me to help him in?'

'You must wait until he explains himself, and then I have no doubt that much of your present feeling towards him will be changed. You will find him very different from what you had expected, and, if I am not very much mistaken, you will regret the misunderstandings which have caused him pain.'

'But I don't see why I should be chosen for this

post; there are many of the other fellows more implicated than I am.'

'My dear Alec, the question of your being implicated does not arise at present. Mr. Blyth has no charge to make against you unless you should first prefer one against yourself, which, being innocent, you cannot do.'

'Then why am I dragged into the matter at all?'

'Because he wants to act the part of a wise and good man, Alec. He wants to get you and your companions to understand him a little better than you do just now; and he thinks that his project can best be carried out through you.'

'I feel the compliment, I'm sure,' said Alec, laughing, but I do not at all relish the work, and would much prefer any one else doing it.'

'That cannot be, Alec, for I have promised to take you with me to-morrow; but I have in no way pledged you to take up the part which Mr. Blyth is anxious to give you—that I must leave you to accept or reject as you think fit.'

Alec could say no more, for nothing could be fairer than his father's arrangement. Mr. Verrinder was very judicious in dealing with his boys, and they gave him the fullest confidence. There never was any thought in their minds of prejudice or unfairness upon his part, and his decisions were as much respected at home as they were abroad.

'One thing, Alec, I must ask of you, in justice to Mr.

Blyth and to myself, and that is that you will not say anything to your schoolmates about this matter at present. There will be no unfairness in your making me the promise, for the suggestion is mine, and I should not ask you to do or say anything at which an honest lad need hesitate.'

'Oh, I know that, father. Of course, if you wish me to promise, I will do so.'

'I do wish it, Alec.'

'Then I promise, sir,' said Alec, in an open and manly way.

## CHAPTER III.

### A FRIENDLY TALK.



R. BLYTH and his old servant had come very suddenly into Highfield, and most people in the town were inclined to speak of him as odd. He was never seen abroad in the daytime, but in the evening he might be observed stealing out wrapped in an old-fashioned military cloak;

and as he walked he had a peculiar limp, which made the young people, who had no better manners, laugh as he went by. Instead of choosing the fashionable parts of the town for his evening walks, he mostly frequented the poorer neighbourhoods, and he had been seen coming out of cottages where he could have no imaginable business, unless, indeed, it were to relieve the poverty and sickness within. He was seen walking up

30

to the old churchyard at a time when most people were glad to be away from so gloomy a spot, and altogether the little man's appearance and habits were sufficient to make inquisitive people anxious to know more about him.

The big boys circulated all sorts of stories as to his mysterious occupation, and these being accepted by the younger as in some degree true, became after a time the settled belief of many who might have had more sense than to have credited such absurdities. Even Alec when he walked round with his father the following afternoon, had in his mind a vague feeling of awe as to the mysterious being into whose presence he was so soon to be ushered. It was one thing to make light of him when Brand and the other club members were by, but quite another matter when Alec was obliged to enter the lion's den alone and undefended!

As soon as the hall door had closed on his father and him, he began to look round with wonder and admiration, for everywhere some interesting object met his gaze, and invited him to a closer inspection. They were ushered into the library, where Mr. Blyth, in a neat, old-fashioned morning dress, came forward and with dignified courtesy welcomed them. After shaking hands with Mr. Verrinder, the old gentleman turned to Alec. 'I am very pleased to make your acquaintance,' he said, extending his hand.

His reception was so unlike anything Alec had ever

expected that it completely disarmed him, and instead of preserving a frigid guard over his lips, he said in acknowledgment, 'Thank you, sir,' and took the proffered hand eagerly.

'Your father has told you of my wish to see you, I suppose?' he said.

'Yes, sir, but not what you wanted to see me about,' said Alec.

'Come and sit by the fire,' said the old gentleman, as he wheeled forward two comfortable arm-chairs, one for Mr. Verrinder and one for Alec, 'and let us talk this matter over at our leisure. Your father did not, I know, mention my reason for wishing to see you, but I suppose you can guess my purport?'

'The conservatory window, I suppose, sir?'

'Yes. I am anxious to talk the matter over with you, for I feel confident that it only needs a little explanation upon my part to show the boys through you that their ill-feeling is not just, and certainly not generous.'

Alec winced at this plain speaking, but it was true, and he felt it to be so.

'I hope you don't blame me for it, sir?' he said quickly.

'I cannot blame any one until my information is somewhat more exact, and indeed I have no thought of making accusations at present; my object is to enlist your sympathies.' Alec looked surprised.

'I may have made more of this boyish mischief than was wise, perhaps, but I considered the provocation very great, and the offence did not stand alone. I have since thought, however, that the plan which I intended adopting in order to discover the offender was not the one most likely to succeed in winning the boys' goodwill.'

'No, indeed, sir,' said Alec, smiling.

'And therefore I wished to see you.'

'What can I do, sir? I can't go and talk to the fellows as you are talking now; besides, it would be worse than useless, they would simply laugh at me.'

'My dear lad, I only wish to-day to put my case before you as an honest and impartial judge; and if you say that you think I am wronged, then I have not the least fear as to the result.'

'I think we have been wrong, sir; but more than that I could not say,' said Alec frankly.

'It never was my intention to ask you to say more. My desire was to lay this matter before you, believing you to be an honest lad, who was brave enough to admit your mistake if you really thought that you and your companions had wronged me; and I have not been mistaken.'

'Look here, sir!' said Alec, throwing off his restraint, and firing up with a gesture of impatience which showed that he felt his position to be uncomfortable; 'the fellows didn't really mean to do anything cowardly,

though I admit we have all been in the wrong. The fact is, we had heard all sorts of stories about you, and the fellows thought you did not like them, and we wanted to make you angry a bit; 'and Alec looked as if this unburdening of his conscience did him good.

- 'Your companions tried so many ways of making me angry,' said Mr. Blyth, 'they could hardly have failed in their endeavours.'
  - 'I know we did, sir-we mistook you altogether.'
- 'And now I want, if I can, to get you to understand me somewhat better,' said the little old gentleman, with a smile.
  - 'As far as I'm concerned, sir-'
- 'Yes, I know I can trust you when you say your opinion is changed,' interposed Mr. Blyth; 'but I wish to influence the others also, and I think you can assist me in my attempt, if you are willing.'
  - 'You don't want me to split, sir?'
- 'No, my lad, I have no such wish; nor shall I ask you to undertake this matter at all for me, unless you are convinced that it is right and wise to do so.'

Alec nodded assent, and Mr. Blyth continued,

'My project is simply this: I want you to undertake to read something to your companions which I shall give you; and I am greatly mistaken if they do not change their views when they have heard it read.'

Alec shook his head doubtingly; but the old gentleman proceeded without appearing to notice the interruption.

'I might have hesitated long before I adopted this idea, were it not that the suggestion came from your father, who has arranged the whole plan by which you are to obtain a hearing from your companions.'

Alec looked at his father in astonishment.

'Yes,' said Mr. Verrinder, 'that is so. I have undertaken my share of the responsibility, and I hope Alec will undertake his.'

'It's such a mystery,' said Alec, laughing; 'but you seem to have made all the arrangements, and I have only to do the reading.'

'Just so,' said his father, 'you have only to read.'

'If that's the case, I don't think I can refuse, although I tell you beforehand I cannot see how I am to get the fellows to listen. Why, there's Clement Brand! I know he will turn the whole thing into ridicule.'

'And I am equally sure that he will do nothing of the kind, my son,' said his father.

Alec laughed and shook his head. 'Very well, father, you take the responsibility,' he said.

'I do, Alec,' said Mr. Verrinder; and of course further objection was useless after that, although there was no concealing the doubts that existed in Alec's mind.

'This is the manuscript as far as I have written it at present,' said Mr. Blyth, rising and opening a secretaire, out of which he took a roll of paper neatly written. 'When you have exhausted this, you must come to me for more, and report progress.'

Alec took the paper, but his incredulity at being able to put it to the use desired by his father and Mr. Blyth was so plainly expressed in his face, that the little old gentleman smiled. 'I see you are still doubting,' he said; 'but as I cannot explain matters further, we had better adjourn. Come with me, and I will show you my treasures;' and so saying he led them to the other end of the room, where were arranged several cabinets containing specimens which made Alec's eyes open wide with wonder. The specimens of minerals and fossils were valuable and rare, but the butterflies and unwinged insects were enough to attract attention in any collection in the world.

'I am proud of my butterflies,' the old gentleman said, pointing to one case in which were displayed some specimens measuring across the expanded wings not much less than a foot. Others less in size but amazingly beautiful in colour testified to the variety of the collection. Mr. Blyth talked about the differences in the species, explaining certain things to Alec which were quite new to him, especially in the matter of their flight. 'We only think of them in this country as the fluttering little things that go from flower to flower with uncertain motion; but I have seen them soaring in the air with a flight as steady as that of a bird. Here are some delicate-looking things which are known to travel great distances in companies, sometimes miles broad, and darkening the sky for many hours in their passage.'

Some came from the Arctic regions, trapped during their brief visit to those unfriendly shores, but most from tropical countries, each having a history to tell to those who, like Mr. Blyth, cared to learn it.

Then Alec had a glimpse through the microscope at its marvellous revelations, and was promised an evening with the telescope when he cared to spend one, with Mr. Blyth, examining the wonders of the heavens. In short, everything he saw and heard of the little old gentleman made so deep an impression upon him, that from regarding him as a peculiar and eccentric old man, he now thought him the most accomplished gentleman he had ever met.

'But you must come now and see my flowers,' said Mr. Blyth, leading them towards the conservatory, where everything that money and exquisite taste could do had contributed to make a little paradise. When Mr. Verrinder and Alec had given expression to their wonder and admiration, Mr. Blyth pointed to the spot where the ball had fallen, breaking not only the circular glass roof, but also smashing in its fall a delicate vase containing a choice exotic.

'What a shame!' was Alec's involuntary exclamation, as Mr. Blyth explained the occurrence.

Mr. Verrinder smiled at his son's admission; but Mr. Blyth made no remark, simply continuing his explanations as to the flowers, telling something of their history and habits, and making Alec wonder still more at the

varied knowledge he seemed to possess, which was more the result of close observation than mere book learning.

After a most delightful hour, Mr. Verrinder and Alec took their departure. The farewell on all sides was undoubtedly warm and genuine, for Mr. Blyth had made a greater conquest than his most sanguine hopes had led him to expect.

As for Alec, he could hardly restrain his eagerness until he and his father were out of the house. When they had gone a few yards, he said warmly, 'I was never so surprised in my life before!'

'In what way, Alec?' asked his father.

'To find Mr. Blyth so different from what I had expected,' he answered.

'It is almost time you began to learn that important lesson, my boy.'

It was Alec's turn to ask a question now. 'What lesson, father?'

'The lesson of withholding your judgment until you know something of the real character of the person you condemn.'

Alec was given of late to little discussions with his friends, and sometimes he even ventured to air his opinions before his father, who listened attentively always, and never rejected his son's arguments without patiently showing where they failed to meet the case.

'But we are generally right in our opinions of people, father, even from the first. There is an instinct which puts us right in nine cases out of ten.'

'Yes, I admit that to a certain extent; but it would be bad for the world if every one was judged upon your principles, Alec.'

'Then what are our instincts for, father?'

'Certainly not to run away with our better knowledge and higher judgment, Alec. Have you never found your first impressions of people entirely wrong upon better acquaintance?'

Alec was silent for a few seconds, then he said, 'Russell's was a case, certainly.'

'Who was Russell?' inquired his father.

'You remember the young fellow who was so persecuted when he came to school first, but whom we afterwards found to be such a brave fellow. He saved young Butler's life, you remember?'

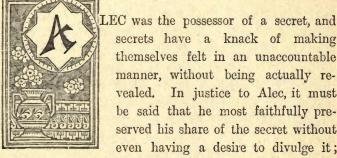
'Yes, I remember. You know what Solomon said, Alec, that "it is joy to the just to do judgment;" and it is far easier to adopt the opinions of other people than to form them for ourselves. A lad or man may inherit defects which he strives to amend; but according to your philosophy we are to allow our instincts to guide us completely. On the other hand, Alec, we are often led by our instincts to admire people of whose conduct we are at heart very much ashamed.'

Alec reddened, and stole a glance at his father, who,

however, did not appear to have made his last remarks intentionally. Before the conversation could be carried further, they arrived at Mr. Verrinder's office, and Alec went off towards home with his mind filled with many reflections which were quite new to him.

## CHAPTER IV.

### ALEC'S FIRST READING.



but, nevertheless, strange rumours got afloat as to some surprise awaiting the members of the football club in connection with his coming birthday anniversary.

That would be on the 25th of October, and a special gathering was to be held at Mr. Verrinder's house on that day, and it was understood that Mr. Verrinder himself was arranging for some amusement which it was hoped the boys would like.

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Alec had confessed as much as this in talking to the boys, but not even Clement Brand himself could get more definite information about the matter at present. The boys naturally began to inquire among themselves as to who was likely to be invited and who left out; but it was generally understood by the members that very few, if any, would be uninvited, for Alec was friendly with them all, down to the youngest and weakest member. Indeed, the young and weak generally found in him a protector, and they therefore looked up to him and claimed his kind help as something which he could not withhold; and many a new boy, at the college where he attended, had to thank Alec for taking his part against lads who were disposed to be somewhat cruel in their treatment of juniors. And so it was generally hoped that whatever was in store for Alec's immediate friends was in store for the entire club. After some weeks had elapsed, Alec brought with him to the club a number of neat cards, which he distributed among the boys; they were printed, and ran as follows:-

## Mr. Alec Verrinder, Jun.,

Will give a Private Reading, in his father's library, on Tuesday evening, the 25th October, at which your attendance is requested.

Tea at Six.

Reading at Seven.

The boys were completely surprised by this announce-

ment. It was so unlike anything they had expected, that for some little time they could not express an opinion upon the matter one way or another. Clement Brand was the first to break the silence. 'What is the meaning of this, Alec?' he asked, with an expression on his face of mingled wonder and amusement. 'You never said a syllable about this to me.'

'No,' said Alec, 'not likely; there would be no novelty about it if you knew what was coming.'

'But, my dear fellow, what are you going to read? You surely are not going to give us a dry essay, such as you wrote for last year's prize?'

'My father has settled all about what I am to read,' said Alec, 'and I have only to obey.'

Clement Brand gave a long whistle. 'Oh! is that it, youngster?' he inquired, in his own peculiar way, which was intended as a punishment for Alec for having left him out of the council. 'Then of course you will divide your discourse into twenty heads, and have "firstly," "secondly," "tenthly," and "twentiethly."'

'How did you find that out, Clement? I thought my plans were a profound secret. But since you do know all about it, don't tell the others, there's a good fellow.' And Alec looked so provokingly in earnest as he said this, that Brand could not but laugh at seeing the shaft he had let fly rebound upon his own head. Alec joined in the good-humoured laughter, and so the matter ended without a storm.

Of course it remained a profound secret as to what Alec was going to read, and because it was so great a secret, expectation and conjecture were all the more rife among the boys. The idea of a reading was perfectly novel to them, and for a change was by no means distasteful. They would all meet at tea, and there would be plenty of fun going on to make the evening pleasant, even though Alec's performance should prove to be of rather a dry character, as Clement Brand suggested. Tuesday evening was slow in coming, but it came at last, and with it there arrived such a host of boys at Mr. Verrinder's house as would have greatly alarmed most people not accustomed to deal with the young.

After a substantial tea they trooped into the library, where seats were ranged in rows just as they would be at a public meeting. James Verrinder took the tickets at the door. Robert conducted the boys to their seats as they arrived, and near the window, facing the audience, there was a small space curtained off, where it was understood the reader was concealed. The arrangement of the curtain was so complete that no one from outside could tell whom it concealed; but one or two persons in the room were aware that it shielded more than Alec Verrinder.

At seven o'clock punctually young John Verrinder, who was the baby of the house, took the library bell from the table, as he had been instructed to do, and rang it. His sister Grace was sitting just before him,

and he could not resist the temptation of ringing it close to her ear, much to the amusement of the boys. She, however, turned quickly round and took up bellringer, bell and all, and silenced them as by magic in the folds of her dress. For a moment it seemed as if the audience would explode in laughter, but Alec stepped forward instantly and began: 'Ladies and Gentlemen,-The present century was not five years old, when, on a stormy night in winter, the good ship Gordon Castle, on her return voyage from India, was wrecked on the Cornish coast, and out of a crew numbering all told six-andthirty hands, only five were saved. There were, in addition to the crew, eighteen cabin passengers, of whom only one survived, and that one myself. I was an infant six months old at the time, and my parents were returning from India. By a desperate effort the sailors and passengers had made a communication with the shore, and my mother and I were the first to be passed from the sinking vessel. The raging sea destroyed the communication, but carried us both to shore, where we were rescued more dead than alive.

'Having been wrapped up warmly and bound securely to my mother's breast, I suffered less than she did. Her bodily injuries were serious, but the injuries to her mind were fatal. She never saw her husband or her other children again, for the sea had closed over them on that terrible night, and left her desolate.

'She soon pined away and died; and thus in a

sailor's hut at the age of six months I began my existence in England.

'These particulars I received from a sailor's wife in after years. They are soon told, but it was long before I was able to understand fully all that they meant—how in one night I was bereft of a father's care, a mother's love, and the affection of those who would have been otherwise the companions of my youth.

'The kind-hearted woman by whose watchful care my frail life was preserved had no children of her own, and I quickly became the treasure of her existence. She was naturally fond of children, and her husband being frequently away for weeks together during the fishing season, my presence in the house was a new source of comfort.

'As I grew old enough to observe my nurse, I noticed that there were times when she grew disturbed in mind, and that this distress was always followed by the visits of a richly-dressed lady, whom I was taught to call in baby fashion "aunty." Before the arrival of this lady, nurse's eyes were red, as if from weeping, and often when she departed nurse would catch me in her arms and cry so bitterly, that I naturally mingled my tears with hers, and thought angrily of the one who had caused so much distress.

'Soon the secret of those visits was revealed. The lady was my poor mother's sister, and as soon as I was old enough to leave the tender care of my nurse, it was understood that I was to exchange the humble cottage for my aunt's fine house in London.

'As the regular periods at which my aunt visited us approached, nurse became anxious lest my rapid improvement should be the signal for the change which she so much dreaded; but it was not until I was five years old that it was finally decided upon, and then I thought it would have broken her heart. For days she refused food, and would only sit and weep. I am sure that much of the brightness of her life departed when I left her; and I know that I experienced the keenest sorrow of my life when I left the dear friends of my infancy, who had done so much to make me happy.

'The free, open-air life which I had led had made me hardy and independent. I had long ago learned to wander down to the seashore by myself, to watch for the returning of "daddy's" boat, the name by which I had always called my nurse's husband, Jacob Strong.

'I was, therefore, not likely to care for the orderly life of my aunt's house in London, which at first utterly bewildered me, it was so strange.

'I know I was very troublesome, for I resented every attempt of those in the house to soothe me, even to kicking a grave-looking gentleman who took me in his arms and tried to speak kindly. He put me down, saying, "Dear me! how rough that child is!" Nor did he ever again repeat the attempt at conciliation.

'The daintiest food was put before me and rejected.

Like a bird stolen from under its mother's wing, that beats the bars of its cage until it falls down exhausted, I wept myself to sleep the first night of my captivity, with a heart as full of sorrow as it could be.

'I soon discovered that I was in the way in my aunt's big house. They were quite unused to children, and under any circumstances I would have proved just then very difficult to deal with. Their very kindness made me stubborn, for had I been left to myself I think I might have been more willing to accept my place in the house. As it was, however, my aunt and uncle both endeavoured to win my confidence, and, failing in the attempt, they handed me over to the care of the servants. I was stubborn and wicked. I broke things, and was pleased to be able to say that I was not sorry for my misdeeds. Without any one to understand me or to pity my condition, it is no wonder that I should have become miserable, or that I should be as great a burden to others as I was to myself.

'After some weeks had elapsed, I was informed by the servants that my aunt had decided upon sending me to school; and they seemed to derive so much pleasure from the fact, that I could only suppose it meant some terrible place where my misconduct would meet with its just punishment.

'My mind began to paint all manner of pictures of the new miseries that awaited me at school; but I made no outward complaint. I had a little bed in a room at the top of the house, which was all my own, and there I could lie and brood over my troubles for hours together. I could not but think, with bitter tears, of the dear old cottage and the beloved ones whom I knew longed for me as I did for them. The very noise of the breakers on the shore came back to my memory with greater sweetness than ever. In that home at least I had a loving heart to care for me; there I was not punished for every trifling offence; there they would gladly welcome me and dry my tears, and kiss me with loving kisses until I felt happy once more. Was it wonderful that I should make up my mind to go and look for my old nurse, whose name I did not know, of whose dwelling-place I was utterly ignorant, save that it was by the sea, but whose loving heart was like a magnet, which seemed to draw mine with invisible power-somewhere?

'Once the idea took possession of me, it grew stronger night by night, until a strange gladness seemed to come into my heart at the very thought of being in search of one whom I loved so well. I read years afterwards of another loving heart which was drawn from a foreign country to England by the same secret power, though knowing neither the language nor the country, and of her wandering north and south and east and west with but one cry on her lips, and that the name of the loved one, until she found him, and when I read it, it touched my heart so deeply that I wept.

'Neither the distance, nor indeed anything else,

troubled me in the least. Why should it? There was but one place in the whole world that I cared for, and every one else was sure to know it; there was but one being in the world who was dear to me, and I never for a moment doubted that she was known and loved by others. Now, it seems almost incredible that I could have been so foolish; but then I considered that my plans were wise and sure to succeed. In my childish way I understood that, if I went at all, it must be at night, and when I would be unseen by those in the house; and it was some time before an opportunity occurred; but one evening, when one of the servants had left the door open to go for a cab, I crept down and passed out into the dusk unnoticed. I ran as fast as my little legs would carry me down busy streets, then into quiet ones, then into squares, then into busy streets again, until-O dear me!-I felt a sudden shock, and in an instant I knew that I had been knocked down by a horse; but I can remember no more, for I became unconscious.'

Alec paused for a moment, and one of the boys remarked, in a tone of sympathy, 'Poor little fellow! What a pity he should have gone out all alone by himself like that!'

# CHAPTER V.

### THE READING CONTINUED.



LEC continued:

'I was so small and so light that it was only a moment's work to pick me out of the mud and carry me out of further danger. A crowd gathered in a moment, and when I regained consciousness I could hear the noise of many voices, and knew that I was

the centre of a large crowd of men and women, who pressed one upon the other to see what was the matter.

'Then a policeman came up, calling out, "Stand back there!" and pushing right and left until he had forced a passage through to where I was lying on the pavement.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Run over—leg broke, I think." "Shame to let a little chap like that out by himself!" were some of the

exclamations that I heard as the policeman bent over me. Then he took me in his arms, and was able to tell, by passing his hands gently down my legs and arms, that no bones were broken, at all events. The big policeman seemed a strange nurse, but he carried me so tenderly that I think he must have had little ones of his own at home, for he spoke gently to me, and praised me for not crying out, and looked at me as I lay in his arms as if I were a stray lamb for which he had great pity. He would have carried me direct to a hospital, but that a little man who had come out of a shop close by said, "Bring him in here, policeman, and let the missus have a look at him. We know pretty well all the youngsters about this part, and they are always getting into one scrape or another. But he's not hurt, I hope?"

'This little man as I saw him then was such a funny-looking person that I could not but look at him many times, and like his looks when I had done so. He was short and stout—very stout—and walked about without his coat, but wearing a large black apron. He had a bright, pleasant face, as if he tried to make things sunny and cheerful always.

'The policeman carried me to the shop-parlour, where the little man's wife was sitting at work. "Come, missus, and see if you can tell the dear child's name he has been knocked down," he said.

"Poor little dear! Knocked down, has he? How sad!" she said, coming forward, and with the utmost

gentleness bending over me. "Give him to me, sergeant, I'm an old nurse, and you, without meaning it, might hurt him," she continued, pleading, it almost seemed, for the privilege of having me in her arms. He gave me over to her tender care, and I had a strange feeling come back to me of days in the little cottage by the sea, when my dear nurse sang me to sleep with sweet hymns. "It always seems so dreadful, the thought of having any one you love taken to a hospital, sergeant; it just seems as if they must die; but this little dear isn't bad enough for that, his eyes are quite bright already, and as soon as he has rested a bit, he'll tell us his name and where he lives, and we'll be able to get him home."

'The sergeant did not seem to like the arrangement altogether at first, but upon further conversation he consented to it, and left to report the occurrence at his station, lest application should be made there for the missing child.

'Of course they questioned me as soon as they could see that I was able to answer them; but I would say nothing more than that my nurse lived by the sea, and I was going to her.

'They looked at one another in wonder. What could it mean? They put their questions in many ways, but it was always the same answer—my nurse lived by the sea, and I was going to her because I loved her.

'It dawned upon them then that it was a childish freak of mine which had led me to leave my home in

search of my nurse; but as I would give no clue to my abode they had to await the return of the police sergeant,

'Meanwhile they put me to bed after a hearty supper. The fat man's wife laid me in a little bed which had evidently been unused for a long time, although, as she said, the things were all well aired; and when she stooped to kiss me a tear fell upon my cheek. I heard her speaking afterwards of some one whom she called Robin, who was now sleeping far, far away.

'Tired and bruised, and yet happier than I had felt for a long time, I fell asleep to dream of the sea and my dear nurse; but when I awoke it was to find lights in the room and several figures round my bed. My aunt and uncle were there, and although they seemed greatly relieved at finding me, they showed no emotion which would lead me to think they were glad to have the anxiety of caring for me again. I lay quite still, listening to them talking; but I became conscious of a strange pain in my head, the result, no doubt, of my having been knocked down. I was to be taken home in the morning, as it was too late then to move me, so that for that night at least I would feel happy; but when morning came I was very ill, and a doctor had to be sent for. I lay there for a long time-so long that it seemed many weeks, and then I was told that I would be sent away to my dear nurse to recruit my health. The prospect of getting away to my nurse revived me. I got better much more rapidly than they expected;

and I was soon in the embrace of the faithful woman who had pined for me as I had for her. It was delightful to be able to breathe freely once more amid the scenes of my infancy. My nurse had a sufficient allowance from my relatives to keep up a comfortable household, and I was sent to a good preparatory school in the neighbourhood, where, though my companions were poor, I received a sound education, and learned to look upon men not for the clothes they wore, but for the honesty of their lives. It was so evident to my aunt that for the present, at least, I was unfit for the society in which she moved, and only happy with my nurse, that I was allowed to remain year after year, until I was ten years old; and then it was decided that I was to be sent to a proper boarding-school, where my education would receive the attention it required.

'Something occurred, however, which prevented this arrangement being carried out.

'I constantly accompanied my nurse's husband, Jacob Strong, on his fishing excursions. Sometimes the fishing vessels from the village went out for a few days, and sometimes for weeks together, as the season was favourable or otherwise; and the rough life had a charm for me beyond all other recreations. I was an expert sailor, and, so far as my strength would permit, could pull a rope or hold the tiller with any of the men. On the occasion to which I allude, our fishing-smack was overtaken in a storm of unusual fury, such as sometimes

makes sad havoc among the fleet of fishing-boats on the English coast. We drove before the gale helplessly for some time, and I could see by Jacob Strong's face that he feared the worst. He did all that was in his power, however. He secured me to a spar, so that in case of accident I should have some chance of being saved, and then kissing me, he told me to pray to God. It was only too evident that the five men on board regarded their fate as certain; yet with calm fortitude they remained at their posts, ready for whatever might come. They had not long to wait, for a great wave broke on our vessel, and in a moment it was swamped, and the gallant men were struggling for life in the angry sea. I lost consciousness, but the timely forethought of Jacob Strong saved my life, for I was picked up by a passing vessel, how or when I know not, and after being well rubbed was put into a hammock, where I slept off the fatigue and terror of the accident. When I awoke my first inquiry was for my companions, of whom they knew nothing, but of whose fate they had no doubt in such a gale. It was hard to believe that they had met a watery grave, and that I was saved; but although the thought was terrible, I could have no doubt about it in my own mind. How strange that twice in my short lifetime I should have been rescued from drowning, whilst other lives far more valuable than mine were lost!

'The gale lasted with more or less fury for several days, during which time I lay in my hammock undis-



LASHED TO A SPAR.



turbed and without any desire to move; but when calm weather set in they were able to think of me, and I was sent for by the captain, whom I found a young man, rough in speech, but kind in heart. He and the cabin passengers held a council, at which it was decided that as it was impossible to return with me to England, I should go with them on their voyage to India, and that I was to do as much or as little work as I cared for at present. I was never an idle lad, and soon began to make myself useful to the sailors, who became very friendly in consequence. My superior education was the means of making my services still more valuable, and for either reading or writing I was constantly in demand.

'One of the roughest of the sailors became seriously ill during the voyage, and it fell to my lot to attend upon him and read to him when he was able to listen to me. For a long time he was delirious, and it was plain that the captain's medical skill was unable to meet his case. He had been a wild, desperate man all his life, utterly careless of his body or soul, and now the excesses of youth were telling upon him. I never can forget seeing him looking at me one day out of his hammock, his great black eyes lit with feverish light, and the masses of black hair falling over his face. He was no longer delirious, and he spoke to me calmly. He said:

"I remember when I was no bigger than you, lad.
I ran away from my poor old mother, and broke her

heart. She left behind her the only thing she could leave, her old Bible, and it's down in that chest yonder, where it has lain ever since I got it. I didn't seem to want it while I was living a wicked life; but I want it now, for I've been thinking of my poor old mother lately, and I believe I'm not long for this world—signed articles for kingdom-come, I believe."

'It was not very much to look at, certainly, when I managed to bring it to light, for the mildew had touched it, and made it look older and shabbier than ever.

"That's it!" he said excitedly. "Now open it, and tell me if you see anything written in her own writing on the cover?"

" Yes."

"Read it!"

""'All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

'He repeated these words over and over again to himself, laying special stress on the "All." "I have done nothing else," he added. Then he said, "Yes, go on!"

"" The wages of sin is death."

"Stop there." And again he repeated the words wonderingly, connecting the two together. "All have sinned—then all must die. Is there any more?"

""'God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our

iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."

'This seemed to take his breath away.

"That can't be true! He would never die for such a sinner as I have been," he said; "and yet—is there any more?"

"Yes, one more. 'And it shall come to pass that WHOSOEVER shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

" Whosoever-what does that mean?"

"Any one-every one, I suppose," I said.

"Then it means me!" and he closed his eyes, and I saw his lips moving as if in prayer. "She used to read out of that book of a night," he said presently; "but my head was too full of other thoughts to pay much heed to anything she said about religion. Now it comes back to me because I want it, and because I'm going on a strange voyage."

"Oh, you'll be well again soon, Mr. Bravo," I said, calling him so because I knew no other name for him.

"No, never again—never again! If what you tell me is true—that Christ died for sinners like me—then I don't mind dying, for you read also that whosoever calls on God shall be saved."

"Yes, 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

'And the strong man clasped his hands together and said slowly, "Lord, I'm a wretched sinner, and wouldn't

dare to come to you if it wasn't for those words! I can't do anything to make myself better; but Jesus died for sinners, and I'm a poor sinner. I can only trust to Him, Lord!"

'We sat together for some time in silence, both, no doubt, thinking of what had been said, and then others coming into the cabin stopped the conversation. Days elapsed, and then I was told that Bravo was dead. A strange gloom seemed to rest on the ship until his body was consigned to the deep, and then the old ways and the old cheerfulness returned; but the conversation made an impression on my own mind which was to be deepened afterwards.'

The reading closed in silence, and with a long-drawn sigh upon the part of some who were listening to the narrative. The story of Bravo's death made a deep impression upon the boys, and there was no loud expression of feeling when Alec made his bow and retired. But there was a generally expressed desire to know when the next reading would take place, so it was fixed for the following Friday, leaving an interval of three days, during which there would be ample time for all to think over the strange events to which they had been listening.

## CHAPTER VI.

#### MORE STRANGE ADVENTURES.



the following Friday evening Alec resumed his reading to the same attentive and appreciative audience. He continued:

'I observed that one of the cabin passengers seemed in great grief, and seldom mingled with the others. He was a middle-aged man, and was

dressed in such deep mourning that I understood, without needing to inquire, that some one very dear to him had recently died. He had heard of my case, but for many days he took no notice of me; and when at last he addressed me, it was to ask some general questions as to my name, and where my parents lived. My answers excited his interest, and he told me that, twelve or fourteen years before, he had met my parents in India,

63

and was aware of the sad accident that had left me an orphan. As I narrated to him the whole history of my short life, and how miserable I felt at the thought of leaving my nurse, his sympathy was aroused, and he entered more fully than I could have expected into the history of his own grief. He had sent his son home from Ceylon to England to finish his education, and enable him to pass through one of the universities; but a lingering illness seized him, and Mr. Williams was only in time to reach England to see his child die. He was returning to Ceylon a broken-hearted man, for he had lost his wife when his son was born, and he was now alone in the world. Our voyage out occupied about four months; but it seemed to me very much longer, and the society on board had become so pleasant, from the time that Mr. Williams took me under his care, that I had no special desire that our voyage should end. For weeks before we sighted Ceylon the crew and passengers talked of little else save the beauties of the island to which we were sailing; and the utmost they could say in praise of it was but poor compared with the view that met our gaze in the early morning as our vessel approached the land. The Bay of Galle, and the wooded hills that encircle it, are like a glimpse of fairy-But the flower-gemmed shore, the hills at the back clothed with forests, the sacred mountain of Adam's Peak rising majestically above all, carried the imagination into cloud-land, and it was difficult to believe that the view was not some pleasant vision that might fade away before our eyes. But it remained, and as we approached nearer to the island it seemed that the beauties and charms of the place increased. Curious double canoes, propelled by half-clad natives, darted across the water towards our vessel, with what seemed the swiftness of birds in their flight. These canoes were filled with strange and beautiful fruits, which the Singhalese desired to offer us for sale. I learned afterwards the names of the various strange and picturesque craft that moved about in the bay: there were Arab dhows and dhoneys from Coromandel, petimars of Malabar, and many others, which together made up a curious and interesting spectacle. When we were nearing the island, Mr. Williams asked me if I wished to see more of it. "I shall go to England by this vessel on her return voyage, and if you like you can stay with me until she arrives," he said.

'I expressed my thanks with a delighted look, for his kind manner had already won my heart, and I knew that my troubles had appealed to his sympathies, as, perhaps, nothing else could have done so well.

'He had no difficulty in arranging with the captain of the vessel, who knew him well; and we were soon on shore among the strange groups that crowded the streets and roads. Nothing could exceed my wonder at the appearance of the Singhalese men, who looked exactly like women, with their smooth faces and long hair, which was rolled into a coil and fixed on the top of the head with a tortoiseshell comb. Their earrings and petticoat-like dress made the resemblance still more striking. We saw a strange-looking man in yellow robes, who Mr. Williams told me was a Buddhist priest; and there were several Europeans in white morning undress shaded by Japanese umbrellas, who must have appeared as curious to the natives as they did to us. The streets and roads were of a bright red colour, and the houses had an appearance which one never sees in England, but which struck me as being pleasant and cool; they were nearly all of a single storey, and along the front was a deep verandah supported on pillars, which gave an agreeable shade to the rooms within. Mr. Williams had an old Dutch-built house, with spacious rooms, and latticed windows; and round it grew in wild profusion Indian fruit-trees and plants, oranges, custard apples, bread-fruits, and bananas.

'As I lay down to sleep that night in my high-roofed bedroom, I could not fail to remember the hymn I had so often heard sung at home, and which came to me now as if borne on a perfumed breeze:

"What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle,
Though every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile;
In vain with lavish kindness
The gifts of God are strewn,
The heathen in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone."

I repeated the words to myself, and then sent up a prayer to Him who was, I knew, as near me in that distant land as He was when I slept in Jacob Strong's cottage by the sea; and I asked Him to keep my dear nurse in safety, and make her happy, for she was the only one now in the wide world, except my newly-found friend, whom I had to love.

'Mr. Williams, I soon learned, was believed to be a very rich merchant, chiefly dealing in spices; and as he had received a tempting offer for his business in Ceylon, he had determined to accept it, and return to spend the evening of his days in his native country. I speedily learned, too, that his sorrows had pressed very heavily upon his heart, and that although he was ready to hold out a hand of sympathy to any one who, like myself, was friendless and destitute, he kept aloof from all society, and went on his own gloomy way perfectly alone. He was just now very busy preparing for his departure from the island, and, as I gladly helped him in every way in my power, I was soon as busy as he. I could tell that he was pleased to have me near him, and my boyish wonder at everything strange about me was evidently a great amusement to him. Occasionally, as we went from one subject to another, he would become almost cheerful, and laugh at my odd questions; but he would suddenly relapse into silence, and I knew it was useless to endeavour to break that spell, which seemed to rest on him for days together.

'I noticed gradually that some thought in his mind with regard to me was taking definite form; and one day he asked, casually, "Philip, what do you purpose doing on your return to England?"

"I don't know, sir," I answered sadly.

"Your aunt will doubtless take you under her care."

'My face clouded at once. "Oh, sir, I hope I shall not go to live in my aunt's house. I couldn't live there!" I exclaimed passionately.

"You know, Philip, that my dear son is gone."

"O yes, sir."

"Would you be content to live with me, and be to me what my dear lost one might have been had he lived —my strength and comfort in old age?"

'The tears filled my eyes. "Would you have me, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"My dear child, I fear my motive is only a selfish one after all; but I need some one on whom I can centre my thoughts for the future, for if I go on dwelling as I do on my sorrows, my heart will break." And, as he concluded the sentence, his voice became almost passionate in its earnestness, as if he were struggling against a fate which roused all the bitterness of his nature. No word ever fell from his lips that could lead me to think that he regarded his trials as having been sent by God, nor did I ever see him read a Bible or any book which could bring him consolation under his heavy burdens,

'In my childish way, I could only say a little prayer for him every night before I went to bed; but that comforted me, for I had never lost a sense of the reality of prayer or of God's willingness to hear and answer it. He must have overheard my prayers sometimes, for he has come in to bid me good night, and I have felt that in the darkness, as he stooped down to kiss my forehead, there was a moisture on his cheeks, as though the long pent-up tears found an outlet when no one was near to see.

'In due time the vessel arrived at Galle on its return voyage, and we embarked, taking with us all the curious and interesting collections which Mr. Williams had accumulated during a long residence in India and Ceylon.

'The excitement of the preparations for our departure had kept his spirits up until now; but it was painful to see how often he would relapse into his old silent moods, and how little intercourse he would hold with the other passengers on board. To me, however, he was always kind, and although I could never wholly succeed in dispelling the gloom that seemed to settle like a cloud upon him for days and sometimes weeks together, he did not resent my efforts to make him cheerful, and even showed by his manner that he understood and appreciated the attempt.

'The long voyage, which seemed almost a lifetime whilst it lasted, but like a dream when it was over, came to an end at last, and our vessel dropped her anchor in the Channel, and Ceylon, with all its beauties, became — what it will ever remain — a wonderful memory.

'The surprise with which my aunt and her husband heard of my strange escape from a watery grave may be imagined. Poor Jacob Strong and his companions were never heard of again, and all hope of ever seeing any of us had long ago been abandoned. Mr. Williams and I called at my aunt's house, and, much to my delight, I found that Nurse Strong had been kindly received into the family, and was regularly installed as an underhousekeeper.

'When my aunt had made the necessary inquiries, she placed no obstacle in the way of Mr. Williams adopting me, beyond stipulating that I was to be sent to a first-class school, and to go to the university in time, and that the expense of my education was to be borne by her.

'My guardian—for such I had learned to call Mr. Williams—took a house in a fashionable part of London; and for some months we went about from place to place, seeing all that was considered worth seeing, and enjoying everything that wealth could bestow. When I saw Mrs. Strong, which I did once every week at least, she always inquired whether I said my prayers and read my Bible; and on my telling her that there was not one in our new house, she purchased a small one for my special use, and made me promise to read it regularly. "You

must never cease to ask God's guidance and blessing, Philip," she said, patting my head; "for every day of your life you will need His help; and remember that your dear Saviour wants to have your heart, that He may cleanse it in His precious blood. It is no use praying to God with the lip. He wants you to pray from a heart cleansed in the fountain filled with blood," she said to me, as she put the neat volume into my hand and kissed me.

'When my guardian and I had enjoyed some months of travelling and sight-seeing, he told me that he had arranged for me to go to a first-class school in his native town, where he purposed taking a house shortly, and where we could be at all events near each other. His present arrangements would keep him in London for a month; and so it was decided that, as the school term had already commenced, I was to go down and join the school at once, as it was important that no time should be lost in my studies. He came with me a few days afterwards, and I found myself one of seventy boys in a fine old collegiate school, which was famous for its education all the world over. The junior master introduced me to my companions, but so many new faces made little or no impression on me. I was too full of grief at parting from my guardian to think of anything else. Still, I felt how important it was for me to study, and determined to work hard and prove myself worthy of the old school. The dormitory in which I

was placed contained twelve or fourteen beds, in which the elder boys of the school slept. I was formally introduced to my companions, and felt strange and miserable amongst them all. My guardian had made me promise to say my prayers regularly every night; and I was glad to find that when I knelt down I was not the only one in the room who did so. We had prayers in the library every evening at eight, but they were of a more public character, and were not supposed to interfere with our private devotions. At half-past nine one of the monitors went round to see that all lights were out in the dormitories, and the boys were supposed to be asleep at that hour, as they rose at half-past six regularly every morning. My first night in the school I retired to rest with the other boys, and by nine o'clock all lights were out and perfect stillness reigned in the room. Not a sound could be heard except an occasional breathing that betokened deep sleep. At nine I saw the tall figure of the monitor passing through the room, and when he had withdrawn I turned round to sleep.

'Presently I thought I heard a muffled sound, as if some one was moving very softly in the room. Then the sound increased, as if several boys had risen and were walking stealthily from bed to bed. I was not frightened, although the strange noise made me uncomfortable; but in a few seconds I felt that the bed in which I slept was surrounded with boys, and that they were evidently bent on mischief. In another moment

the blankets were firmly grasped, and by a clever movement I was being tossed at their mercy hither and thither, whilst from all parts of the room suppressed laughter might be heard. It being pitch dark, I could not see my tormentors, nor could they see me; but I determined that, whatever might happen, I would endeavour to keep silence. It was useless for me to make any effort at resistance, or to do anything towards releasing myself from my very awkward position. They pulled, and shook, and rolled, and tossed me at their will, until with an unusual effort they sent me spinning beyond the blanket to the floor. I struck some sharp substance in my fall, and then the agony of the pain caused me to scream. My back was hurt, but I was just able to rise, and by a great effort to regain my bed. I felt certain that my scream would bring some of the masters to the dormitory, and I knew the disturbance that would follow if I were discovered on the floor hurt,

'As if by magic, every boy in the room was instantly in bed and apparently asleep!

'The head monitor came hastily into the room almost immediately. "What noise was that?" he asked, looking round at the beds, where the boys lay as calmly as though every one was sound asleep. Not a voice broke the silence; but the monitor, judging rightly that I might have been the victim of a joke, came to my bedside, where I lay, not indeed asleep, but with my eyes closed because of the intense pain I felt in my

back. I had managed somehow to gather the clothes about me, and by good fortune I had so arranged them that they did not strike the monitor as being remarkably disturbed. He was evidently puzzled, for he stood looking round at the beds, as if expecting that some of the boys would betray their secret by laughing; but after remaining some time, and no explanation coming, he went out, and we were once more left in silence. This time the boys were too much alarmed to make any further noise, and one by one they fell asleep in earnest, leaving me in wakefulness and pain. I was very miserable and lonely, and longed for the morning, for the darkness was oppressive. The young moon rose later on, and I was able to discern by its feeble though welcome light the dim outline of the room. As I lay there, in great distress both of body and mind, I was conscious of some one close to my bedside. I was now really alarmed, for I thought that any further practical joking would be more than I could bear. Before I could speak, a hand was gently placed on my shoulder, and a young voice asked, in a whisper, "Are you hurt?"

'It was so soft and kind in its tone that I felt the tears come into my eyes as I answered, "Yes, very much indeed."

"I am so sorry for you! The fellows did not mean to be cruel. It's one of the laws of our room that every new boy is blanketed the first night, and if he stands it without making a noise he is accepted." "I was hurt very much, and could not help crying out," I said.

"I know you were; you fell against my bed, and I felt the shock. Can I do anything for you? I have a bit of cake in my box that I brought from home last week, Would you like a bit?"

'I thanked him sincerely, but had no appetite for cake just then, so he stole away to his bed again, saying, by way of good-bye, "I'll come to you in the morning. My name is Redfern, and if I can do anything for you, just tell me, and I'll do it. You won't be tormented again, I know."

'It was a pleasant touch of kindness, and just then it was the very sympathy I needed. I knew what it meant to bear pain like a man, and I would have died rather than appear a mere child before my companions.

'I suppose I slept during the night, but I know that, sleeping or waking, I was conscious of much pain, and when the morning dawned I tried to raise myself in bed, but found it almost impossible to move. At a quarter-past six the bell rang. Loud and long its tongue proclaimed the unwelcome summons that told us we must at once be up and dressing, so as to be ready for the morning muster at half-past six. The boys began to rub their eyes, and lazily think of a new day's work. When they were awake sufficiently to remember what had occurred the night before, they seemed to jump out of bed as by a common instinct and gather round me for

news. "Well, youngster, were you hurt last night? You cried out as if you were." "Tell us all about it," were some of the greetings that they gave me. It needed no words of mine to prove to them that I was suffering; they could see it in my face; and one boy called out to some one at the other end of the room, "Doctor, you are wanted here!" A nice-looking lad came up, laughing. "What is wrong? Any bones broken?" he asked. "Just see what is the matter with him," said the first speaker. "He hurt himself last night when he fell."

"I should have said it was you hurt him when you tossed him," said the boy they called the doctor, laughing. "But turn round and let us see the wound," he added, speaking to me. When he saw my back he looked serious. "This is no laughing matter, I can tell you," he said, looking round at the boys. "I don't think he'll be able to get up to-day; and won't there be a row when Plutarch comes to hear of it!" Plutarch was the head master, I afterwards learned.

"" I'll get up and dress," I said.

'The doctor bent down, and said softly, "I'm Redfern; let me help you on with your things. Would you like a bit of my cake now?"

'I smiled at his offer, so kind and yet so comical, that it struck me he must regard cake as a universal remedy.

"You are very kind," I said, "but I don't think I could eat it just now."

"Oh, very well, it doesn't matter; but if you don't take it now I'm afraid it will be all gone by to-night."

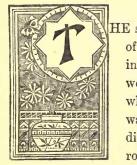
'They managed somehow to get me dressed, and I did my best to bear up; but I felt once or twice as if all my strength was going, and that the moment I tried to walk or stand my legs would refuse to bear me.

"If we can only get him to pass muster!" said Redfern, taking my arm. "You fellows go first, and we'll follow. How do you feel now?" he added, speaking to me.

" Very faint,"

## CHAPTER VII.

BROKEN BONES.



HE second reading ended with a burst of applause, which testified to the interest which the boys took in it, as well as to the efficient manner in which Alec had done his work. It was some time before the audience dispersed, for groups of boys gathered round Alec, and plied him with

questions as to whether it was possible that all he had read to them was true, or whether some one had not invented it for him.

'No,' said Alec, 'it is all perfectly true. It is the history of a person whom my father knows.'

'I say, what a brick he must have been, to have borne up under that pain! No wonder he cried out. I expect we'll hear that his back was really injured,' said Clement Brand, speaking with the authority of a future doctor. 'They ought to have left him in bed; but I suppose they were afraid of "Plutarch."'

'Alec, just tell us what happened when he got down to the library,' said another.

'Did he get there at all?' asked one boy.

Alec only laughed. 'You have had full value for your money to-night,' he said; 'you must wait for the next reading, which will be on this day week.'

'You will be down to the club on Saturday, remember,' Alec shouted to the boys before they went. 'Unless it's pouring with rain we mean to have our game.'

'Yes, we'll be there to time,' they answered; and then they went away evidently very much interested in the reading, and wishing that it were possible to have the continuation of the narrative earlier than a week hence.

Before Clement Brand went he whispered to Alec, 'Have you heard anything further about the conservatory?'

'No, my father has not mentioned it.'

'Do you think the old man has given up the idea of discovering who did the mischief?'

'I'm sure he has not,' answered Alec, looking at his friend with a smile.

'You seem to enjoy the fun; but you are just as much implicated as I, remember.'

'I don't think so, Clement. You would find it difficult to prove it.'

'I am not the least frightened,' Brand added; 'but there seems so much mystery about the affair that I don't like it, especially as the old hermit has gone for advice to your pater.'

'Yes, I believe my father has great sympathy with him, and unless I make a mistake the old hermit has seen him several times since the accident.'

Clement went away feeling very uncomfortable, for there was an undefined dread in his heart of legal proceedings. He had a vague suspicion that all was not right, and that by the slow and sure process of the law he might find himself any day under arrest. It was as if old Mr. Blyth were quietly undermining his position; and he feared there would be a terrible explosion some day, that was too dreadful to think about, when the mine was sprung.

He had to pass in sight of the old house on his way home, and very gloomy it looked, for little or no change had been made in its outward appearance, with the exception of the addition of the large conservatory at the back and the extension of the garden into their field.

He stopped to look at it, for there was a certain fascination about it that was irresistible. Why, surely this must be the old hermit himself coming up the street not twenty paces from where he stood! And the tall gentleman walking arm-in-arm with him can be no other than Mr. Verrinder

Clement was fortunately in a favourable position, for just where he stood he was out of the light of the lamp, and the spot was in deep shadow. They would have to pass him on the opposite side of the way, so he stood quietly where he was to let them go by. Evidently they were in high spirits, and much amused at something, for Mr. Verrinder was laughing, and talking so loudly that Clement could hear what he said. As they passed him he heard Mr. Verrinder say distinctly, 'I believe our plan will discover the culprit; and I think you must do me the credit of admitting that the discovery will be a triumph of skill when it is made.' To which remark Mr. Blyth made some reply, which Clement failed to catch. He had heard quite enough, though, to send him home with a flushed face and an uneasy conscience.

When he told Alec about it, there was not much comfort in the reply he received. 'You know the old adage, Clement, "Listeners never hear much good of themselves;" but how do you know they were talking about you at all?'

'I'm perfectly certain of it—who else could they be talking about?'

'True. It looks very bad for us; but we must wait patiently.'

'There is nothing we could do, I suppose?' said Clement. 'I hate the idea of being caught like a rat in a trap!' 'What could we do?' inquired Alec.

'I could go to the old man and make a clean breast of it, and tell him he might do what he liked as to prosecuting me,' Clement answered.

'I don't think that would do much good; and it would be very awkward for you to have to go to him and make such a confession.'

'I would do anything rather than live in suspense day by day.'

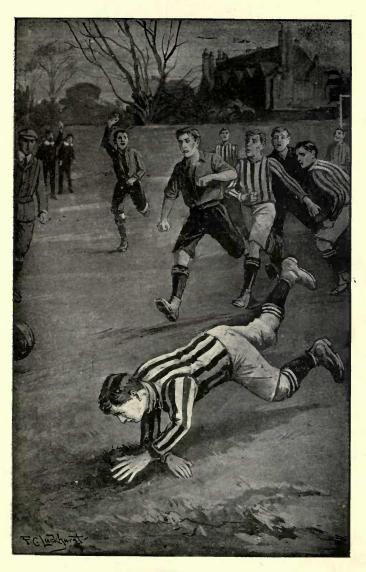
'But do you feel any better towards the old hermit himself?' inquired Alec, smiling.

'Not likely! after all this bother,' said Brand.

'Still, Clement, as my mother says, he is an old man, and almost defenceless, and very much at our mercy,' remarked Alec.

'He came here and spoiled our field, which was no use to him that I can see; and he must bear the consequences if a ball sometimes does find its way into his premises.'

Alec made no reply. He seldom did when Clement began arguing after that fashion, for it was useless. It was simply that Brand had lost all patience, and said the first thing that came into his mind as a justification of his act. He did not like to confess it to himself or to Alec, but the fact was that he was brave and careless only so long as he thought his antagonist helpless; as soon as he became aware of some mysterious agency at work, which proved beyond doubt that his



THE CAPTAIN'S FALL.



antagonist was not so helpless as he imagined, he felt an uneasiness that increased daily, and was not likely to be lessened by the remark he had overheard.

The Saturday of that week the football club had its customary game, and very well contested it was, for the younger boys were becoming more familiar with it than when the season began. Clement Brand and Alec were the captains, and it happened to-day that Alec was fortunate in his choice of men, although, so far as strength went, the balance seemed to be in Brand's favour.

Both sides had played well—so well, that when it was growing dusk it seemed as if the game would result in a draw. Brand, however, was not in the humour for defeat, and in the last effort to make a goal both sides put forth all their power recklessly. Who could be safe in such a crowd, with such rushing and kicking in total disregard of life or limb? The juniors, wild with excitement, seemed unconscious of bruises, and there was no telling how the game might have ended, had not Clement Brand himself fallen on the slippery grass, and cried out lustily for help. He always declared that the ground was greasy; but whatever the cause may have been, it was very plain to see that he had injured his right arm seriously. 'I'm certain it's broken,' he said, 'and I begin to feel queer. Alec, you and one of the other big fellows cross hands and let me sit on them. If you can carry me round to Dr. Fairfax, do so as quick as you like.' In an instant every boy wanted to be doing some good office to help the wounded captain; and Alec and one of the bigger boys were able between them to carry Clement down to the doctor's without inflicting much pain.

Dr. Fairfax was in, fortunately, and, as the boys crowded into his consulting-room, it might have been supposed that some terrible catastrophe had occurred to the town. The good doctor was fond of boys, and he knew something of the football club, and guessed in a moment the nature of the accident.

'This football club of yours will be notorious presently,' he said, when he heard all about the accident. 'But you must all turn out—every one—except the two boys who carried him here; and just take a turn down the road and back again, or the police may think you have come to break my windows, if they see you crowding outside.'

The boys went out laughing at the doctor's remark, and taking comfort from the tone of his voice that Clement's accident was not of a very serious nature.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A HERO.

LEMENT was right. His arm was broken, and had to be set in splints. He was taken home very carefully under the doctor's supervision; and, although he suffered a great deal of pain, he bore the ordeal like a man, the doctor said. Kicks and bruises were the portion by necessity of

most of the members of the football club, but it did not fall to every one's lot to possess the honourable distinction of a broken arm! For a little time Brand's arm eclipsed Alec's reading in the thoughts of the club members; but even broken arms lose their enchantment in time, and the boys began to remember the history of him whom they had left faint and ill in the dormitory, about to undergo the ordeal of the morning muster.

Alec was obliged to defer his reading until Clement was so far recovered as to be able to take his place once more amongst them. And when he appeared he received a most cordial greeting all round. There was something about the splints, and the straps, and the sling, that could not be resisted. Clement was proud of them, and the boys were proud of them, and of him, for he spoke familiarly about the 'humerus,' and the 'radius,' and 'ulna,' until he seemed to know as much about them as Doctor Fairfax himself. Then, of course, it must be borne in mind that he intended to be a great surgeon some day, and it was only fitting that he should speak professionally about his accident now.

No further news reached him about the old Hermit's inquiries. He had ample time to think of the matter during the weeks that he lay nursing his arm; and the more he thought of it the more anxiety it brought him. Alec had rather avoided the subject with him latterly, and therefore he did not care to talk much about it when his friend came to visit him.

He was very glad to be out again, and specially glad to be able to attend another reading. 'I made Alec promise the first thing that he wouldn't have another reading until I was well. I would not have missed it on any account,' he said, as the boys gathered round him and congratulated him; and then after a time the reader's bell rang, and Alec came forward to his little desk and began:

By Redfern's aid I managed to walk down-stairs, and then, once in the library, it seemed as if a great point had been gained, and that all else was easy enough. The boys forgot, however, that although I might try to conceal my pain, I could not conceal the pallor of my face, which told plainly enough that I was suffering. The head master saw my distressed face in a moment, and came over very thoughtfully and asked the cause of my illness. I told him I thought if I lay down for an hour or so I should be better, and he immediately ordered Redfern to take me back to my room. This was most welcome. "I hope you don't think I'm making a fuss about nothing?" I said to him, as we walked back together.

"O no!" he answered at once, "I can see you are looking very ill. I wish I could do anything for you."

"I don't want the other fellows to think me a coward," I said anxiously.

"No fear of their doing that!" said Redfern, laughing. "They all say you are a regular brick to have borne up as you have done."

'This comforted me, for I was anxious that they should not think me childish and unable to stand my own share of hardship. We got up to the dormitory again after a considerable effort, and I was glad to be able to lie down once more, for the pain I endured was very great. "You don't think the head master will know what happened to me?" I inquired.

"Not unless there is more fuss made about your being laid up, and that is not likely, for the fellows sometimes feel queer, and are allowed extra bed."

'It occurred to me that I should require a great deal of extra bed before I felt better, unless my present feelings changed very much within a few hours.

'Nothing could be kinder than Redfern's manner. He was a short, stout lad, about fourteen, full of fire and mirth—ready for anything that had a spice of adventure or even danger in it, and yet ready to talk like a child with any one whom he thought in sorrow or pain.

"Look here! I have a capital book in my box, full of pictures. I have not had time to look at it yet, but I'll leave it with you; and I know it will do you ever so much good-far better than moping away all by yourself up here. And then I have a bit of the cake I was telling you about. Here it is; I'll just lay it on your pillow. Oh, you must have it! every fellow can eat cake," he said, as I shook my head and tried to smile my thanks. It was plain he meant me to have the cake in spite of all my opposition, so I let him place it for me on the pillow, where I could easily get it if I liked; and the large, handsomely-bound book, which had evidently been a present, he laid by my side. Then he drew down the blind of the window near my bed, and looked round the room anxiously, to see if there was anything else he could possibly do for my comfort. "I'll run up occasionally to see how you are getting on," he said in a low voice; "and you must try to keep up your spirits. You will be all right to-morrow." Then he went away very softly and shut the door.

'But I did not get all right by the morrow. My injuries, whatever they were, appeared to the doctor who was called in to be serious. I was removed to the head master's private dwelling, where a room was set apart for special cases, and there my guardian came to see me. There was the greatest possible consternation amongst the boys of my dormitory when it became known that I had been removed to the head master's house, and that a physician from London was coming down to see me specially. It was perfectly certain that a searching inquiry would take place into the cause of the injury, and it was impossible to say what might be the result of it.

'The case had one peculiarity which did not usually occur in similar difficulties, and that was that when the accident occurred it was pitch dark, and the boys could not see one another, and, for reasons that were plain enough, they maintained a strict silence, so that, neither seeing nor hearing, they could not tell who had taken part in the mischief. Of course, amongst themselves, it was well known who the ringleaders were; but they were not bound to criminate themselves, so they kept their own counsel.

'Mr. Hepworth, the head master, was very indignant that a new scholar should have received such treatment on the very first day of his entrance to the school. He

spoke to the boys, telling them of the serious nature of the injuries I had received, and that a strict investigation would be made into the case as soon as Mr. Williams, my guardian, came down.

'Redfern stole up one evening to see me, and told me all this; but he made no comment on it, merely remarking that the boys were all in a nice "stew," as he called it.

'When my guardian came he was greatly troubled about me. The moment I saw his face I noticed that the same cloud that used to rest upon it whenever he spoke of his dead son appeared the instant he looked at me. He had the same stern way of talking about what he called his fate, as if he only wanted the opportunity to rail against it as something that had followed him all his life, only to blight every fair promise that had ever made his heart glad.

"Well, Philip, this is bad news of you," he said sadly, as he took his seat by my side.

"Not very bad, I hope, guardian!"

"Bad enough, my dear lad—bad enough!" he answered bitterly. "The physician tells me that you have been severely hurt, and he wonders very much that you did not make more noise about it. We must have a proper inquiry, so as to discover the boy who is responsible for the affair."

"Will you grant me one request, guardian?"

<sup>&</sup>quot; What is it, Philip?"

"It is one you can easily grant me; and I know it is one that you will never regret."

"All right! I promise it—unless it is something very unreasonable."

"Promise me that you will not take any steps to punish the boys! They never meant to injure me, and I am quite sure they are as sorry for what has happened as you are."

"That is unreasonable," said my guardian. "They deserve far more punishment than they will ever get, I fear; and anything that I can do to mark my condemnation of their conduct I will do!" and he spoke with some degree of warmth.

"They have been very kind to me, and have expressed, over and over again, the greatest regret for what has happened. If you only knew them better, you would think as I do. I am sure of one thing, guardian—that if you do not make me the promise I have asked, I'll not get any better."

"My dear Philip, if promising that, or anything else, will make you better soon, I will promise it with pleasure. You cannot tell, dear boy, how much it grieves me to think that at the very outset of your career you have been laid aside like this."

"Redfern lent me a book the other day in which it said that every trouble was sent for some good purpose, and did not happen by mere chance. Doesn't that seem rather strange to you, guardian? It does to me."

"Well, Philip," said my guardian doubtingly, "there are some troubles that I suppose have a good purpose, but there are others"-here the black shadow swept over his face again-"there are others without any purpose, except to make the life dreary and black and dead!" He was looking, as he uttered these last words, evidently away beyond me and beyond the present into the past, where the vision of his son appeared as the answer to the question I had asked. Another figure also was in that vision, although I did not see it, and that was a lady with a sweet little baby by her side, and with a sweet smile upon her face; but the pure light of eternity shone upon the mother's face and made it white-oh, so very white-and cold and still, for her spirit had fled to be for ever with God, and the baby was my guardian's only child!

"Does God know all that happens to people down here, guardian?"

"Yes, certainly. We must believe that God sees us and knows even our thoughts, so that everything that happens to us must be known to Him also."

"And do you think He would like us to be unhappy for no good purpose?"

"We chiefly make our own miseries, my boy," my guardian answered, but with some reserve of manner, as if afraid to admit too much.

"You remember the poor sailor on board the ship that picked me up, who died on the voyage out? He

seemed to think, from what I read to him, that God had pardoned him, and that He loved him, although he had been such a wicked man. Is that true?"

- "My questions disturbed my guardian, although they by no means distressed him.
- "I suppose, Philip, that the man repented of his evil ways; and when we repent God is gracious and forgives us."
- "But he did not say anything of his repentance; he seemed to take comfort from a few verses I read to him out of the Bible."
- "What were the verses, Philip?" asked my guardian with interest.
- "I have often thought of them since; and if you hand me a Bible off the table in the corner, I can find them for you now."
- 'He got the Bible, which was one belonging to the head master, and I easily found the verses I wanted. "It was not easy for me to find them at first," I said, "but after some trouble I came upon them and marked them. This is the first: 'All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.'"
- "Yes, that is quite true," my guardian remarked; we are all sinners."
- "The next is, 'The wages of sin is death.'" My guardian listened in silence.
- "The next, God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Then, 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.'"

'I closed the book, and waited for Mr. Williams to speak, but he remained looking out towards the window, as if busy with his own thoughts. "We must talk of this another day, Philip," he said presently; "for the fact is I have not read the Bible as much as I might have done, and I am really not capable of discussing the question with you. One thing, however, I can promise: I will read those verses for myself, and see to what they refer, and then give my opinion on what is certainly a very important subject for every one of us."

"What about the other promise I want you to make, guardian?"

'He got up and came to my side. "When I spoke about that matter before, Philip, I felt somewhat angry—naturally so, I think; but I see that no good can come of punishing the boys, although they must be told that my first intention was to be as severe as the offence warranted, and I shall tell them so myself."

'I was so happy at the thought of having secured my guardian's promise that I did not trouble about what he might say to them, as I knew very well his generous nature would not allow him to speak unkindly to them.

'He was very anxious that I should be moved to his

own house; but the physician said that was impossible at present, and as my being where I was did not put the school to any inconvenience, there could be no reason for my being changed.

'The head master very considerately placed a private suite of rooms at my guardian's service; and as it was important that he should be near me, he accepted the kind offer, and took up his residence there.

'Redfern and the other boys came but seldom now, for fear of meeting Mr. Williams, whose presence in the house made them very uncomfortable. It was understood from rumours that were afloat that some inquiry was to be made publicly; and it was considered not at all unlikely that each boy sleeping in that particular dormitory would be asked plainly whether he had taken act or part in the matter. My guardian's appearance made matters worse, for his many troubles and hardships had given his face a grave and severe expression, which made people sometimes think him harsh.

'I heard of the boys, however, and longed for the meeting between my guardian and them, which I believed would set matters right. I had promised not to enter into any conversation about the intended interview; and therefore when I saw Redfern I did not allude to the subject with him.

'One morning, after the boys had assembled in the library, the head master informed them that my guardian wished to speak to them about the affair in No. 4 dormitory, which had turned out so seriously; and he had purposely abstained from putting any questions himself to the boys up to the present, so that the inquiry might be conducted by Mr. Williams in person.

'The boys looked at one another, as much as to say, "It has come at last!" and then, before they could collect their thoughts on the subject, Mr. Williams entered, looking to their imagination more severe than ever. He spoke a few words to Mr. Hepworth, and then addressed the school. He said: "By your head master's permission, I want to speak to you about this unhappy circumstance that occurred to your young companion on the first night of his entrance to the school. I believe he was almost the youngest boy in the dormitory, and I very strongly suspected that there was some foul play on the part of the boys who blanketed him. When I came down here I was intent on making the fullest inquiries, and punishing as severely as possible those who had so wantonly inflicted what will prove, I fear, a life-long injury." Here my guardian's voice faltered a little, although his face, if anything, became harder and more severe. "Philip, however, has won from me a promise which I never thought I could have made-to allow the matter to rest here, leaving it to each one of you to see how serious the consequences of thoughtless conduct may be, even when there is no actual malice displayed. My dear boy has forgiven you, and therefore I may; but if you have hearts that can feel a single pang of remorse, you will never forgive yourselves!"

'Young Redfern rose, with a face ablaze. "May I speak, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, by all means," said my guardian,

## CHAPTER IX.

OPEN CONFESSION.



E really didn't mean to hurt him, sir,"
Redfern began, looking round at his companions, whose spokesman he was; "and we had all made up our minds to tell you how it happened as soon as you asked us any questions. It was like this, sir. We always try whether the young fellows who are

put in our room are plucky or not. Generally it's blanketing, but sometimes it isn't, especially if they know what we are going to do. It doesn't hurt the fellows, and it's good fun. We thought the new boy would be sure to cry out, and so we wanted to give him a few good tosses and drop him in time to get back to bed. We were in such a hurry that we did it too fiercely, and tossed him right out on the floor. He struck against my

100

bed, for I heard the thud, and I felt sure he was hurt, and then he cried out. He stood the pain bravely, but of course it must have hurt him awfully, and we are very sorry for him, sir, and hope he'll forgive us!"

'No one could see Redfern and listen to his speech—hot and hasty like himself—without believing that the lad was honest and felt the sorrow he expressed. Mr. Williams was touched at the boy's frankness, and said he was very pleased to hear such an expression of regret, especially as he could see that it was genuine. "Our room would like to go up and tell him, sir, that we are very, very sorry for him, and hope he'll be soon better," Redfern added.

"I should be much pleased by your doing so," said my guardian. "You understand that by his intercession you are allowed to go perfectly free—the offence is forgiven."

"Thank you, sir; we understand what you mean; and we should like to tell him how much obliged we are."

'Before the interview closed, the head master remarked that he had left the matter in Mr. Williams' hands by his request, and he could only thank that gentleman for his great kindness in overlooking the offence, and felt certain that the lesson would not be lost upon the scholars.

'There was no loud expression of thanks on the part of the boys; but they were sincerely thankful for the result of the meeting, and grateful beyond words to me, who had obtained the pardon for them.

'It was arranged that in their interview with me they were to see me one by one; and very hearty the interviews were; so much so that they almost overpowered me. Redfern was the last to come in. "I can't thank you half enough," he said, sitting down by my side; "only for you we should have been all expelled, or punished in some other terrible way."

- "Not you!" I said, looking at him in surprise.
- " Why not?" he asked wonderingly.
- "Because you were not one of those who did the mischief," I answered.
- 'He looked at me and laughed. "How can you possibly know anything about it? It was pitch dark," he said.
- 'It was my turn to smile now. "You forget that you told me yourself that you were in your bed when I fell against it, and that you felt the shock."
- "We were all equally guilty, because we were all conspirators," he said, smiling; and he evidently thought so, nor did he for a moment think of making his own responsibility less by attaching blame to any one.
- 'When my guardian heard that Redfern had not been directly concerned in my accident, it made him think more highly of him than before. "He is a generous lad," he said; and whenever Redfern came to see us afterwards my guardian was very kind to him, showing him in many

ways that the circumstances of the case had made a favourable impression on his mind.

'It was many weeks before I could be moved, and then only with the utmost care. The doctors gave my guardian hope that in time the effect of the injury would pass away sufficiently to allow of my taking an active part in life, although they did not conceal from him that I should carry with me to the grave some traces of it. Sea air was recommended for me, and my guardian immediately decided upon purchasing a yacht, and cruising wherever inclination led us. He secured the services of my nurse, who most willingly resumed her charge of me, and we set out upon our travels as soon as the necessary arrangements were complete, hoping great things of the experiment.

'We sailed into the Mediterranean, and touched at all the places of interest. Spain, and Italy, and Greece in turns occupied our attention and excited our wonder. Everywhere we went we gathered information, as well as many interesting specimens of various things which struck us as being new or strange, and I drank in the life-giving air which was considered so essential for me.

'One calm evening, as our little vessel lay almost motionless on the deep blue sea, my guardian and I sat together talking.

"Philip," he said, "you remember a conversation we had one day in the head master's room about trouble, and about it being sent for our good?"

- "I do, guardian," I replied, looking up at him with a quick glance, for the subject had been very much in my own thoughts.
- "I have read the Bible very carefully, as I said I would, and my views about God have very much changed. I can see now why it was that all my troubles made my life bitter."
  - " Why, guardian?"
- "Because my heart was hard, and I had no knowledge of God's love to me. When I think, Philip, that God loved me so much that He gave up His onlybegotten Son to die in my stead on the cross, it makes my heart lie in the dust before Him. I have been all my life a miserably selfish being, caring nothing for God, so long as I had all that my heart could desire, but rebelling and repining whenever He took from me a single possession. I see now that all the way He led me was in goodness and mercy, that He might bring me to Himself."
- "I am more delighted than I can tell you to hear that," I answered; "for I have wanted some one to talk to me about those verses, and make them clear to me."
- "Dear Philip, God, by His Holy Spirit, can make them clear to you as He did to me. It is our blessed Saviour in whom we must trust, and not in ourselves or in anything that we can do. If you and I were in the vast ocean tossed by angry waves, and we were sinking, surely we should cling to the lifeboat and trust in it, if it came to our rescue; and our sense of safety would

come altogether from it, and not from ourselves. So we must trust in Him who 'came to seek and to save that which was lost.'"

"I understand now the meaning of that verse, 'He was wounded for our transgressions.' It was sin that made God give up our Saviour."

"It was, Philip. Sin is the great mountain between the poor sinner and God; and the blood of Jesus Christ takes the mountain away, and nothing else can do it."

'We lapsed into silence then; but we were both busy with our thoughts. After some time my guardian said, "There is one verse in the Bible that gives me great comfort; it is this: 'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' I have asked Him to give me one thing, and that the blessed sight of my dear Philip able to walk again."

"He will do it, guardian, I am quite sure, if it is good for both of us."

"Will you ask Him, my boy?"

"Dear guardian, I have asked many, many times."

'We both prayed heartily for that blessing; and although it was delayed, it came; and when I was able to lay aside my crutches and walk unaided once more, our prayers of gratitude were no less hearty than those of our desire.

'But a great shadow fell upon us suddenly, and changed our lives,'

## CHAPTER X.

### CLEMENT BRAND MEETS A RIVAL.



the close of Alec's reading it was plain that each one of the boys began to regard the lame lad as a living personage whom they could almost see in imagination, and in whose history they felt a great interest. When it was understood that one more reading would bring

the story to a close, and that the final reading would take place a week hence, the boys were full of anxiety for the time to pass quickly. They asked many questions about the hero of the narrative; but Alec kept his own counsel, difficult though it was to do so, and preserved his secret admirably. Clement Brand began to think that, after all his anxiety, the investigation as to the damage to the conservatory must have been

allowed to drop, for he heard nothing of it from any quarter; and it was impossible to suppose that so long a time would have been allowed to elapse had anything been discovered as to the author of the mischief.

Somehow he could not forget the story of Philip's accident, and the generous way in which the boys had behaved in the matter. He contrasted in his mind his own thoughtlessness, and the indifference with which he had acted, with the conduct of young Redfern and the other boys in the school. His heart had been touched by the narrative, and the deeper and more solemn things which he had listened to during the readings had made a lasting impression on him. He was not naturally vicious; but as his mind dwelt upon the past he saw how selfish he had always been, how careless of the comfort or happiness of others, how quick to resent injury or to inflict needless pain. Then, in how many ways he had allowed opportunities for doing kindnesses to escape him! Among his younger companions how frequently he might have been a help and a guide, whereas he had been a stumbling-block! He did not, fortunately, make any brilliant resolves as to what he would do in the future; but he began to think less bighly of himself and his dignity, and that was the first step towards thinking somewhat of others. But every day brought him temptations to continue in his old way of living, whilst every day, too, he had opportunities of trying the new and better way if he were so minded.

He would not for the world let any one suppose that he invited attention to the change that had occurred in his thoughts; but the football club was not the place where a young fellow could long conceal any secret, and much less a secret so likely to come to the surface as this, if there was any reality in it. He had to occupy the place of a captain, and very much of his influence in that capacity was due to a rough-and-ready domineering spirit which would brook no opposition. Alec Verrinder was, after his own fashion, just as much a captain as Clement; but he ruled by a different power, although he admired his friend as one capable of leading others much more successfully than ever he could. The boys, especially the younger ones, were a little afraid of Clement Brand, but they one and all loved Alec.

Owing to his arm Clement was obliged to relinquish his place as captain for a time, although he was able to be present at the games, and to show that he had by no means withdrawn the influence which his opinion always carried with it. The next time the club met Clement was there, with his arm in a sling, and looking some inches taller in consequence. He met Alec coming into the field. 'I want to have a long talk with you to-day, Verrinder,' he said, by way of greeting.

'It must be after the game, then, for we shall not have too much daylight as it is,' Alec replied, putting his arm through Clement's sound one, and walking towards the group of boys who were already preparing for action. 'Who is to be captain on the other side to-day?'

'Westrop, and an excellent one he will make too.'

The other was silent. He and Westrop were not the best friends, for Westrop belonged to the new school that had recently opened, and there was an undefined feeling of rivalry between them, because young Westrop declined to take Brand's opinion as final in everything, and sometimes ventured to express his own.

Alec had unconsciously touched a weak and sore spot, but it was so plain that he meant no offence by the remark, that Clement soon forgot the sense of disappointment which it had caused him.

The play that afternoon was excellent, and many times during the game Clement wished heartily that he could throw away sling and bandages and join the fun. Westrop's leadership was so good that Alec found himself obliged to put forth all his powers of strategy and skill to meet it; but those who knew Verrinder's play were confident as to the result. They were disappointed, however, for Westrop won the game; and the greatest possible uproar and rejoicing followed when the lads gathered round Clement Brand, who, as usual, was offering his opinion upon the manner in which the game was played.

Westrop came up breathless, and wiping the perspiration from his face. 'We didn't do badly—to beat old Verrinder,' he gasped out, in great glee. 'You ought not to have had that last goal,' Clement said; 'it was a mere accident;' and it was more the manner in which it was said than the remark itself that seemed to carry a sting with it; but the sting was there.

'I doubt if even you could have prevented my getting it,' said Westrop, rather nettled at the ungenerous remark.

'I'll give you proof of that some day when my arm is well again,' said Brand, with a smile; 'I flatter myself I can win five games out of six with the men Verrinder had.'

'Let it be an engagement, then, whenever you like, said Westrop, turning towards Clement, and speaking with evident warmth.

'Oh, don't excite yourself about the matter, Westrop; I'll give you an early proof of the truth of what I say,' Clement observed, with calm dignity.

'If you can,' said Westrop, turning on his heel and going away in a huff.

The boys were ready enough to laugh at this little passage of arms between the two captains, but by no means disposed to think less of Westrop for standing up for his due share of merit, for he had played well and won fairly, as Alec admitted. Indeed, there was very little doubt in any one's mind as to the motive which had actuated Clement Brand in making the remark. It was pure jealousy and vexation at the brilliant and unexpected success of his rival, and was very unhandsome.

Alec saw how matters stood, and, coming up to his friend, he said, 'I must be going home; if you want to have a talk, come along.'

'O yes; I want to speak to you particularly.' When they were out of the field on the way towards town, Clement inquired, 'Have you heard any news of the old Hermit since?'

'Yes,' said Alec, with great seriousness. 'I heard my father remark to the mater that the offender would be discovered in a few days.'

Clement stood transfixed by the news. 'Are you serious?' he asked.

'Never more so; why should you doubt me?'

'Because it seems incredible that they should have discovered anything; unless—' and a sudden thought seemed to flash across his mind.

'Alec, do you think it possible that Westrop could have divulged? You know he does not like me, and I believe he would injure me if he dared.'

Alec could not keep from smiling; and a good hearty laugh would have been most enjoyable just then, for, without in the least meaning it, his friend had been describing his own feelings towards Westrop, whilst asserting that they were Westrop's feelings towards him. They had stopped on the road, and Alec said, 'Let us get on; I'm rather chilly. I'll tell you all about it presently.'

For with the rapidity of thought Alec saw in his friend's remark how unwise and untrue the spirit of

selfishness was, and how miserable it must make those who are slaves to it. He could not and did not forget the honest spirit which breathed in the readings he had given, and he remarked to Clement, as they walked on together arm-in-arm, 'I think you are unjust to Westrop.'

'Why so?'

'I think you were unjust to him to-day, without perhaps meaning it; and I'm *sure* you are unjust to him in supposing that he divulged anything about you.'

Clement was silent.

'I don't think you are quite generous enough in your thoughts, Clement, and you see the result is that one wrong thought makes many.'

To his utter surprise, Clement Brand said in reply, 'You are right, Alec; it is my besetting sin.'

If the ground had suddenly opened at his feet Alec could not have been more astonished. To think of Brand, of all fellows, making such a confession as this, was far beyond his comprehension. He had fully expected a stout denial of the charge, and even anticipated a little coldness between them in consequence; but for so frank a confession as this he was altogether unprepared—so completely, indeed, that he was at a loss what to say in reply.

Brand did not wait for him to speak, but continued, 'I have thought lately—in fact, to tell you the plain truth, I have thought since your readings—that I am

rather inclined to be too selfish, and I did mean to try the other plan; but it seems that the moment an opportunity comes for me to act differently, I forget all about it, and do just the thing I ought not. If you believe me, I'm ashamed of myself for having said what I did to Westrop just now. He played an excellent game, and won it like a man.'

'So he did,' assented Alec. 'I didn't take your remark as any compliment to my play, I can assure you, when you said that with my men you could easily win five games out of six.'

'I did not believe the truth of my own words when I uttered them; but I could not help saying what I did, like the fool I am.'

'Never mind the folly; we are all fools at times. Tell him you are sorry.'

'That's the awkward part of it. Don't you see that if I go to him and apologise for having made the remark, he will think at once that I am really afraid of him, and want to avoid playing? And that I certainly don't want him to think.'

'You can play him all the same. Do what you know is right, and never mind what he thinks.'

'I could still play him, certainly. I think I shall do what you say, Alec, although it will be a bitter pill.'

'Not when it is over.'

There was a dire struggle going on in Clement's breast between the old hard spirit and the newer and better thoughts which were born of the history he had listened to, and which might lead to deeper and more enduring impressions still, if he did not shut his heart to the influences at work. Alec was most anxious that his friend should decide for what was just and honourable, for he saw that such a decision now would very materially help the end which the readings had in view; and a frank admission of error on Clement's part now would make it much easier to repeat the act of justice later on.

'You may think it strange, perhaps,' said Alec, speaking with some difficulty on so delicate a subject, 'but I have found it lately a great help to say my prayers.'

'Night and morning, do you mean?'

'Not merely then, but through the day. If things come into my mind that are not right, or if I'm angry and likely to do or say something silly, it's a great help just to say a little prayer.'

It took more real moral courage for Alec to say these few words than he had any idea of. When they were said he felt they were the right words, and that, whatever his friend might think of him for speaking on such a subject, it was a relief to have done so.

'Perhaps that is why I have failed in doing what I wished. I always think it is easy to be brave and resolute until the time comes to act, and then one's good intentions are forgotten in the first rush of anger; and for my part I feel as if the more pain my remarks give the happier I am for the moment.'

'Just try my plan; it gives one great strength.'

'I will,' said Clement, speaking in a much more subdued voice than was usual with him, and bidding good-bye to Alec, who was anxious to get home as quickly as possible, for fear of catching cold after his great exertions.

When he had gone, and Clement was walking home in a thoughtful mood, he remembered what had been said about Mr. Verrinder having remarked that the offender would be discovered in a few days. He would have pursued Alec, in hope of overtaking him, but he thought he would wait until next they met. Meanwhile could he not try Alec's plan with regard to the difficulty in which he found himself? This affair had become a very serious difficulty, and he would gladly see his way out of it without discredit.

In his distress he did put up a petition that God would direct him to do what was right, and give him strength to act honourably by everybody, and that in speaking to Westrop he might be able to make a manly apology without letting it be thought that he was in any way cowardly. His heart felt lighter when he had breathed the prayer, and it seemed to him that a new strength was infused into his purposes for right—a strength which came not from his own heart, but from a Power above and beyond him, through the prayer he had uttered.

# CHAPTER XI.

#### THE TIDE TURNS.



LEC, tired and glad of repose after his contest with Westrop, lay full length on the sofa in the parlour. He had been talking to his mother about the club, and especially about Clement Brand, when his father came in from the office, and, as usual, had a kind word for his boys. 'Well,

Alec, had you a good game to-day?'

- 'Yes, father, but lost. Westrop was too many for me.'
- 'Well done, Westrop! But I thought you were the champion, Alec?'
  - 'Not exactly. Clement plays well when he likes.'
  - 'As he does most things, I suppose-when he likes!'
  - 'Oh, but he is not like that now. He seems quite

changed to-day,' Alec said, without knowing exactly the full meaning of his words.

Mr. Verrinder smiled. 'To-day!' he said. 'Why, what change has taken place in him to-day? and will it last until to-morrow?'

Alec saw in a moment that he had been unjust to his friend in speaking thus of him. 'I did not mean that he had changed to-day, father, but that a change has been coming over him lately, and that I saw the effect of it to-day.'

'In what way, Alec?'

There was sufficient confidence between father and son to make Alec cheerfully confide the whole circumstances which had occurred in the field and on the way home; and there was ample reason for his doing so, because Mr. Verrinder was in a great measure the cause of the change that had taken place in the lad's conscience.

'I am very glad indeed to hear so good an account of young Brand. He is a fine young fellow, who has been unfortunately spoiled by having too much his own way. Your readings, Alec, have contributed indirectly to the good result.'

'I should say directly, sir.'

'There are other factors at work, but still your readings are evidently taking effect; and, please God, they will, when they close, bring about the happy result that I anticipated. Has Brand any idea of our hero?'

'None whatever. He asked me to-day whether I had heard anything further about the affair, and I told him what I heard you say.'

Mr. Verrinder smiled. 'I shall be glad when the secret is out, for the poor boy's sake, although I don't think we have been very unkind in keeping him in suspense so long.'

'I know that he will be very glad if it ends happily,' answered Alec. 'I think he worries about it a good deal of late.'

The other boys coming in stopped further conversation, for although they were all now familiar with Mr. Blyth as a visitor at the house, it was understood that the utmost secrecy was to be observed, not only as to his visits, but also as to the readings. James and Robert were to be members of the football club next season, and it was necessary that they should feel as much interest in preserving the secret as Alec himself.

Indeed the entire family was in a constant state of anxiety as to the result of the readings. Many counsels had been held on the subject, and many laughs had been given at the prospect of the surprise that awaited the boys when they discovered the author of the narrative. Could Clement Brand have seen the strange figure concealed each evening behind the curtain which was supposed to hide only the reader, and could he have seen the glee depicted on every face as that strange figure stepped out when the audience had dispersed, he

would not have believed the evidence of his own eyes. The small, sedate gentleman, who as he walked showed that he limped a little in his gait, was no other than Mr. Blyth himself. Not Hermit Blyth now! for, as James and Robert and John gather round him, there is plenty of merry conversation and no little laughter. beneath it all there is the stillness of a tranquil spirit, which, having passed through many storms, had found anchorage at last. He delighted to have the children about him, and to talk to them; he seemed to create a feeling of kindliness in the hearts of others by his conversation, and to make them wonder at the secret of that peace which seemed to fill his heart and life. How strange to see him later on, when the family had gathered round him in the hall to say good-night! With his old-fashioned cloak about him he looked once more the weird old gentleman who had given so much offence to the club; and, as he went limping down the street, all the strange stories of his life and character that were afloat in Highfield seemed natural enough. But only natural to those who knew nothing about him. Not natural to the poor, whose homes he visited, and whose lives he brightened by his presence! Any absurd stories about Mr. Blyth would find a quick denial from them, because they knew his kindness of heart, and had many proofs of his untiring sympathy. To them his quaint figure presented nothing laughable, for they knew it to be the figure of their friend; but to the foolish and the thoughtless there was much about him to excite curiosity and mirth.

The very next Monday, Clement Brand had an opportunity of putting his resolves to the test. He was walking with Alec down the High Street, when they came upon Westrop and half a dozen companions. Now Westrop was annoyed at his rival's manner on the previous Saturday, and was very much disposed to be on his 'high horse.' At any other time Clement Brand would have immediately mounted his unlovely steed; but now, with a new and sudden impulse, he stopped. 'Westrop,' he said nervously, and colouring up, 'I made a silly speech to you on Saturday.'

Westrop expected anything from Brand save a speech such as this, and it took him so completely by surprise that he too coloured up, and looked just as nervous as his rival. He was far too generous not to see immediately the frank admission contained in Brand's words, so he said, 'It annoyed me, I confess, to hear you throw cold water on my play; but—'

'I was foolish enough to say what I did with that intention, but I am sorry for it.'

'All right, Brand, don't say another word,' Westrop said, putting out his hand and taking Clement's cordially. 'There's no use in making quarrels; they come fast enough, without our going out of our way to look for them.'

'Yes; but we don't cry off our games, mind,' Clement said, laughing.

'Certainly not. But we shall play as friends, not enemies.'

And so they parted, with all the accumulated ill-feeling of many months ended for ever by a word.

'You have acted like a man,' Alec said exultantly.' You have done more now to prove your strength than if you had won fifty games.'

'But I didn't do it with that object.'

'Never mind, it is done, for all that. Do you feel any happier?'

'More so than ever I felt in my life before,' said Clement, smiling; 'I think my next effort must be with the old Hermit.'

'I should wait, if I were you, a little longer—until you feel that you can really forgive him.'

'You ask too much now,' Clement said, laughing.

'Less will only spoil the action, and you must not do that.'

'What did you tell me on Saturday about the old man?'

'I told you what my father said; but I can tell you something else: he knows nothing about your share in the business, and until you speak the secret never will be known to him.'

Clement gave a sigh of relief, for matters had been getting disagreeably warm, he thought, within the last few days, and this was refreshing news.

I am very glad to hear you say so; but still I think

I shall go and see the old man, some day when I can screw up my courage sufficiently.'

'Do not go until you forgive him.'

Clement laughed at his friend's importunity. 'To come back to more interesting topics, you finish your readings to-morrow evening?'

'Yes, and I am heartily glad they are nearly over.'

'Are we really to hear who it is to whom all these things happened?' asked Clement.

'I think so. I know he is a friend of the family, and we sometimes see him; but on that subject I must be silent, for I have promised my father.'

'I should like to see the hero. I feel an affection for him already.'

'So do I; and the more I know of him the better I like him,' said Alec.

The friends parted, and did not meet again until the following evening, when the usual assembly gathered in the library, anxious to hear the conclusion of Alec's readings.

When he stepped from behind the curtain, he could not conceal a smile, and before commencing his reading he said, 'I am requested to state that the author of this narrative will appear before you to-night, and will in person testify to the truth of all you have heard.'

No stranger being in the room, it very naturally occurred to Clement Brand and some others that the history was probably that of Mr. Verrinder himself, and they listened for some proof that this was so.

Alec resumed:

'The cloud that unexpectedly darkened our lives was a sudden change in my guardian's fortune. It appeared from what I could gather that his money had been embarked in something which had always been considered safe, but which had suddenly failed, leaving him and hundreds of others almost penniless.

'He called me into the cabin one morning, and told me he wanted a little serious conversation. He had a letter in his hand, which had only that day been received at the poste restante of the port where our yacht was anchoring, and the moment he began to speak I knew that something had occurred of a very unusual character. "What is it, guardian?" I asked anxiously.

"My dear Philip, do not alarm yourself. Thank God, there is nothing more seriously wrong than that my fortune is wrecked, and I am to-day a poor man!"

'He spoke so cheerfully that I echoed the tone of his voice unconsciously, and said, "Dear guardian, as long as we are spared health and strength, we can do without fortune, if it please God to will it so!"

'The tears came into his eyes. "Ah, Philip, I expected no other word from you! But you forget."

"What do I forget, guardian?"

"You forget that there are relatives who have a claim upon you; and it is not to be supposed that you can tie your fortunes to a man who is a beggar."

'My colour rose as I said, "You have been both father

and mother to me, and as long as I live, and am able to earn a crust of bread, I shall remain with you. God is good, and we can trust Him. He has answered our prayers before, guardian, and He will answer them again."

'Had my words contained news of another fortune for him, he could not have shown more real joy—nay, not so much; for his whole frame trembled with suppressed emotion, and he laid his hand upon my shoulder, saying, with a trembling voice, "I thank God for this day, Philip! It has proved to me that I am rich beyond all my dreams. Come what may, I can have no anxiety whilst your affection remains to me; it is far more precious than gold or silver. But we may not be absolutely penniless; only it is necessary for me to return to England at once, and discover the true extent of my loss."

"I think we can do one thing, at all events, guardian, we can trust Him."

"Ah, Philip! I can trust Him now as I never thought I could," he answered quietly and earnestly, as if the feeling in his heart was too solemn and too deep for many words.

'He told my old nurse all about the change in his fortunes, but he met the same reception from her as he had met from me. She cared not what became of her so long as she was allowed to be near me. As for fortune! why, no changes in fortune could affect one who was prepared

for them all, and whose simple wants could be met by a few shillings a week.

'So that our sudden reverse, instead of being a source of grief to us all, seemed rather to be an occasion of rejoicing. I know that I never saw my guardian more light-hearted than he was that day; and although in the evening he sat busy with certain ledgers and cash-books, which very seldom made their appearance, and although as he studied their contents his brows were knit, and he seemed now and again to press his forehead, as if in distress, still he was able after a time to close the books and put them away, saying, with a smile, "Come, Philip, get down the other ledger, and let us see how our account stands."

'My puzzled face made him laugh. "This is what I mean," he said, taking down the Bible, and opening at a favourite verse in the prophecy of Isaiah.

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness."

"Are we safe in trusting to that promise?" he inquired, looking over at me with a smile.

"" Oh, guardian, you know!"

"Yes," he said slowly and reverently, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

## CHAPTER XII.

#### PHILIP ASSUMES A NEW CHARACTER.



arriving in England, my guardian immediately communicated with my aunt on the subject of my future. My health was almost restored, and it was of the utmost importance that I should no longer delay my studies, as they had been sadly interrupted hitherto. I had not been altogether

idle, for during our voyages I had read regularly; and I was anxious now to redeem the time, because the more I read the greater did I feel my lack of knowledge. It was decided that I should continue to reside with my guardian, nurse also being with me; but he would not listen to any proposal from my aunt for contributing towards my support at present. It was understood, however, that I was to have a private tutor, the cost of

126

which was to be borne by her; but this was the only concession he would make.

'When matters were more carefully examined, my guardian found that, although the greater portion of his money was gone for ever, there still remained sufficient to enable him to embark in a small business; and this he determined to do immediately. A house was taken some little distance from the City, northwards, and there we three settled down as cheerfully and as comfortably as though it were a mansion and we were the possessors of riches.

'Widow Strong, as she called herself, made everything appear homelike in less than a week; and there was more real enjoyment in putting our small house in order ourselves than ever there could be in seeing it done by others. My guardian was full of hope, and far more cheerful than ever I had known him before. It was something to have to make an effort for daily bread, and seeing how full of courage we were, he took heart at once. As soon as the home arrangements were complete my tutor came, and I began to work with right good will. It was surprising the progress I made in a short time; and the thirst for knowledge increased as I went Being much alone, except for the companionship of my old nurse, I became a passionate reader of poetry, and in time ventured to attempt some verses for myself, which, as a profound secret, I read to my companion.

'It was not a very wonderful production, but it made her weep, because it pictured something of our old life by the sea, when Jacob Strong and I went out on fishing excursions together.

"It's lovely, Master Philip! I can fancy I hear the noise of the waves as you read it to me. You must have it printed."

"Oh, nonsense! they would never print this," I said, holding it up and laughing, but feeling gratified at her remark.

"You try, Master Philip," she answered, with a solemn shake of her head,

"Well, if you promise not to say a word to my guardian, I will try," I whispered, the colour rushing to my face at the thought of such a thing.

'After much careful revision I compressed my little poem into a reasonable space, and, choosing a local paper which sometimes admitted short poems, I sent it with a beating heart.

'Oh, what days and nights of pleasant dreams I had, with occasional sharp pangs of despair, until the next issue of the little paper; when lo! my poem not only appeared, but a prettily-worded compliment from the editor followed it, in which he pointed out the unusual power displayed in its composition. My cup seemed to overflow. I shed tears of joy, not so much at the sight of myself in print, as at so unexpected a recognition of the merits of my work.

'Widow Strong was almost beside herself with joy. It was so impossible for her to repress the feeling, that

when my guardian came home that evening he began to have serious doubts as to her sanity. She brought in the kettle and put it where the teapot should be on the table; she poured the milk into the teapot instead of water; she laughed and nodded her head in so unusual a manner, that my guardian looked at me and inquired anxiously what it all meant.

"It means, guardian, that she is anxious you should read a little poem written by a young fellow in whom she is interested."

'He laughed heartily. "Is that all? I am glad it is no worse—poor woman!" he said, drawing his chair to the fire, and taking from me the paper which I offered him.

'He read the poem over several times, and then he said, "It is exceedingly good. She may congratulate herself on the success of her young friend." He spoke so decidedly, that I felt my face was betraying my secret. "Philip," he exclaimed, "surely it is not yours?"

"Surely it is, guardian," I answered, laughing. He was very serious about it, and I greatly feared he was going to chide me for wasting my time; but after some further consideration he said:

"My dear Philip, when God gives us special gifts He intends that we should use them, and use them not only because we have them, but because they glorify Him. You can sing of His love and faithfulness as heartily as David did, although perhaps not so beautifully. But

you must be careful, for it is easy to write bad poetry, but very, very difficult to write what is thoroughly good; and I would rather see you a good carpenter than a bad poet'

'This advice was good, and I determined to act upon it, so that although I thought much about my success, I wisely decided not to attempt anything further for the present.

'One day, walking through the city with my guardian, a stranger stopped us. He was a young man with fine intelligent features, which the moment I looked at them seemed to belong to a dream that was indistinct yet familiar

"I see you don't remember young Redfern!" he said, extending his hand to my guardian with a smile; and then turning to me, "How you have grown, to be sure!—but still suffering for our folly," he added thoughtfully, as he looked at my foot.

'We were both delighted to see him, and he gladly accepted our invitation to come up to our modest little house and hear the story of our lives since last we met, and narrate his own. He was so frank and affectionate, so like the Redfern of other days, that it would have been impossible to do anything else than feel the old regard for him that we had both felt then.

'Our little house seemed larger and brighter for his presence in it when he came. He was just entering upon life, and was studying for the bar, but among his many acquaintances there was a danger of his being led into the vortex of fashionable life, for wherever he went he was a favourite, and, according to his own account, which he gave us in a light and laughing manner, his engagements were increasing in importance every day. He insisted upon my visiting him at his chambers, and, suddenly remembering that he had engaged some friends to dine with him the following day, he would take no denial from my guardian and me, but we must join the party.

'We discovered to our sorrow that young Redfern, who was now of age, had allowed his good nature to carry him into the society of men whose influence could have no good result. He was living a careless and useless life, and it was impossible to say how such a career might end. He visited us occasionally, and always seemed to enjoy a quiet evening with us after the excitement of his round of pleasures. I confided to him my poetic secret, and immediately he foresaw for me a brilliant success.

"My uncle is editor of one of the best magazines of the day," he said exultantly. "Give me some of your poems as specimens, and your fortune is made."

'I gladly accepted his kind offer, and he bore off my bundle of MSS. with all the delight of doing some one a service which had been a trait in his character from the first time we met.

"Consider yourself famous, Philip!" he said at part-

ing, with a pleasant wave of the hand and a smile that showed how pleased he was.

'His uncle requested me to call upon him; and I found him a courteous gentleman, who had carefully read my specimen poems, and thought them admirable as early efforts. He pointed out to me the importance of continued study and the dangers and privations of a literary career, but was kind enough to hold out a hope that I might do good work in time, if I had industry and patience. He also advised me to try some prose work, and sent me away with a heart full of gratitude and hope.

'I studied on and laboured honestly to fit myself for the career which seemed to open before me, determined, however, to abandon for the present all effort to get my writings published. Redfern came to see us frequently; but it was evident that his mode of life was not improving him. He carelessly told me one day that he belonged to the advanced school of thinkers, who believed that all things happened by a supreme law, and so forth, all of which from his lips seemed strangely out of place. I reasoned with him, and although he talked very learnedly, I knew that in his heart he acknowledged the truth of what I had urged upon him; but he went away as usual, light-hearted and kind, shaking his head at all my arguments, and calling me parson. When next I saw him, he was lying on a bed of pain, having met with a serious accident, and all his foolish philosophy had vanished into air.

"Oh, Philip, I have been brought to my senses!" he groaned. "You are right, and I knew it, but I was ashamed to acknowledge it."

"What a comfort to think that we can acknowledge our faults, and know that we have forgiveness through the merits of Him who died for us! 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"You have been a true friend to me, Philip—truer far than the host of those who only care for one as long as there is plenty of mirth to be had. All their philosophy will not bring peace to a sick bed."

"There is but one thing that can ever do that," I said. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' But let me read the verses which precede and follow that one for you, if you care to listen to me just at present."

"O yes, Philip," he said, putting his hand out to touch mine, and smiling his thanks in spite of the pain. I read for him out of the fourth and fifth chapters of Romans until I came to the verses, "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we

were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

"Read those verses again, Philip, very slowly," he said, "so that I may take in their full meaning." And when I had finished reading, I noticed that his cheeks were wet with tears. "'While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' That is the philosophy for a broken heart, and that shall be mine!" he said solemnly.

'I visited him frequently during his enforced captivity, and, though his strength quickly returned, his faith did not prove the less real, but grew with his renewed vigour, and changed the whole course of his thoughts. With a nature so earnest as his it was impossible to remain still, and so I was not surprised to see him dash into my little study one day with a face beaming with delight. "Congratulate me," he said, seizing my hand. "They have accepted me, and I am now about to commence medicine in earnest. I shall be qualified in a few years to go out as a medical missionary to South Africa, and carry on the noble work of that brave young missionary Moffat, who is doing such service for the Gospel."

"You are right, Redfern. God speed you!" I said, as I returned his hearty grasp of the hand; and, looking into his handsome face, I felt certain that he would make a splendid missionary, if God spared him health and strength.

'He told me how difficult it was at first to get his old companions to understand the meaning of his determination. "They really thought me mad," he said, laughing; "and it was so impossible for me to refrain from laughing at the comical expression of their faces, that I found it very hard indeed to convince them of the reality of my purpose. They tried hard to lead me back to their ways of thinking and living, but it was fruitless; and I must now do what I can to bring them round to my way of thinking, with God's help."

'We spent many delightful evenings together, my guardian, Redfern, and I; and our lives flowed on quietly and usefully for several years, until Redfern was a duly qualified medical missionary, and I was a steady, hardworking writer, whose books were received with favour, and whose influence for good was increasing every year.'

# CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST READING.



T was difficult to believe that Redfern had actually left England, and was on his way to Africa; but more difficult still was it to believe that my dear guardian was slowly but surely losing his bodily strength, and less able to carry on the business which required all his attention

He had never spoken about himself; but one evening, as we sat together after tea, he complained of a feeling of weakness, and when, with some difficulty, I got him to the sofa, he seemed to lose consciousness for a time. Nurse ran for a doctor who lived near, and, upon his arrival, he pronounced it to be a serious attack, which required prolonged rest.

"Has he any pressing business engagements?" he asked.

"Nothing beyond his ordinary duties," I replied.

"He carries on his business as merchant in the City."

"He must relinquish that for the present. You will have to undertake it for him."

"But I am totally ignorant of it!" I said, amazed at the suddenness of the proposition.

"It would kill him to have to return to it," he said; "and more than that, I must tell you that his case will probably be a very tedious one, if indeed he is ever again fitted for business duties; therefore you should make arrangements for having his business conducted in his absence."

'This was indeed a terrible affliction; but I saw at once what my duty was, and that night I locked up my papers, determined that I would not again touch them until my guardian's business was settled. I went down to his office the following morning, just as he had been accustomed to do, and, with the aid of his managing clerk, I was able by close application to understand something of the mysteries of the business that day. I never ceased to examine and study and labour until I was master of the business; and then the duties of my new position were so numerous and important that I had little or no leisure. It was beyond my guardian's comprehension how I could have so thoroughly mastered the details of the business in so short a time; but he little knew the sleepless nights it cost me, or the continued tax which it was upon my brain. But as my knowledge increased, so the pleasure of successful trading increased also. I had the satisfaction of knowing that all my undertakings were prospering, and whenever I made up

my accounts I could see that wealth was accumulating faster than I could have imagined.

'The change was very great from the quietude of my study and books to the excitement of my counting-house, and to the transactions which had to be decided off-hand, sometimes by telegraph, involving loss in case of failure, but making substantial additions to my wealth in case of success. My guardian, who was now a confirmed invalid, was still sufficiently clear in his intellect to notice the change in my demeanour, and he said to me one day, "Philip, you are making money fast."

"I am, sir; so fast that we must move into a bigger house. It will never do for us to stay here. Besides, I want you to have carriage exercise every day; it will set you up again."

"A carriage, Philip!" he exclaimed.

"And why not, sir? Our means justify it, and the business is yours."

"No, Philip, I have taken care of that. Long before that attack came on me I felt what was coming, and made arrangements for the business to be carried on by you as you might think fit, but I have kept the papers a secret until now."

'Here was another proof of his watchful care for my interests—if, indeed, I ever needed proof.

- "Will you promise me one thing, Philip?"
- " Anything, guardian."
- "That you will retire when you have made a certain sum of money?"

- "" How much, sir?"
- 'He named a sum so large that I laughed.
- "Most willingly do I promise, guardian; but I shall be an old man long before then!"
- "Never mind. I hold you to that promise, remember, Philip; and though I may be dead and gone, you must abide by it."
- 'Another strange wish of his, which seemed to be one of the results of his weak health, was that I should purchase an old house in his native town which was advertised for sale by order of the Court of Chancery. I ran down and saw the place; and, were it not for my desire to please him, I never should have spent money on such a dilapidated old place. But the amount was not large, so I purchased it, and then forgot all about it in the pressure of other work.
- 'We moved into a large house in a good part of London, and I drove in my carriage to town daily. Business was increasing so rapidly, that I was compelled to take handsome offices and a large staff of clerks to meet the growing demands of my prosperity; and so matters went on for years.
- 'Dr. Redfern came into my office one day, bronzed with the tropical sun of Africa, but just the same hearty, earnest man as ever, only looking much older. After the first greeting, he looked round at my handsome offices, and then he turned to me.
- "You are an old man before your time," he said; and it is not worth it."

- "Am I really much older?" I asked, with a smile.
- "Philip," he said, putting his hand on my shoulder, take a friend's advice, and be careful."
  - "But I am careful."
- "You are not careful of health—I can see that; and there are other things to live for besides wealth."
- 'I laughed, and turned the conversation; but his remark remained in my memory long after he had forgotten it. We were much together during his stay in England, and he delighted us with his stories of African life, and the success which the Gospel was having in that wonderful land. My guardian revived considerably, and took a deep interest in all the particulars of our friend's difficulties and dangers. To hear him describe the primitive mode of life, and how he was obliged to be doctor, carpenter, cook, blacksmith, nurse, and missionary all in one, was most amusing; but he delighted most of all to tell us of the success which he had achieved amongst the native tribes, and how wonderful the change was from heathendom to Christianity and light.
- "If ever Africa is to be civilised," he would say energetically, "it will be by the power of the old Gospel which did so much for me."
- 'My nurse was especially delighted to see Redfern. "It is like the good old days, sir," she said regretfully, when talking to him. "And I only wish we had them back again."
  - "Why, Mrs. Strong?" he asked.
  - "Because, sir, we don't seem to be like our own natural

selves at all. Here am I obliged to sit in a carriage like a lady, and go driving through the streets of London, feeling miserable all the time. We have so much ceremony and grandeur that it almost chokes one at times."

'Redfern laughed heartily.

"You have not changed, I see," he said, glancing good-humouredly from her to me.

"You know, nurse, you were always averse to making a show in the world," he said.

"There is such a thing as making a show and wearing your life out, Mr. Redfern. I don't think much of grandeur that has to sit side by side with sickness, and grey hair, and worried looks, and sleepless nights."

'And, having delivered herself of this crushing broadside, she went out of the room, dangling her keys, which she carried at her side now, in a dignified manner, and looking in her high cap the very picture of a faithful old servant, who would cheerfully have laid down her life for the one she loved.

'Dr. Redfern enjoyed this little scene exceedingly. "I see you are not left without a faithful adviser; and what she says is only too true, Philip. You can purchase position too dearly."

"No one thinks less of position than I do," I said, amused at the earnest manner in which he seemed to speak of my mode of living.

"It is not the position, Philip; it is the railroad speed at which you are living that is likely to do you an injury." 'This circumstance, slight in itself, proved clearly that others were aware of the tension of my life. It was quite true that the ever-increasing demands of my business made the strain upon my mental and bodily powers very great; but I bore up wonderfully, and the stream of wealth flowed steadily into my coffers until my guardian's sum was very nearly reached.

'But his days were numbered. All that care and comfort could do for him was done; but his life was flickering slowly out, and we who watched constantly by him knew that a few weeks at the utmost was all that remained to him. Yet how peaceful and resigned was his heart! He looked into the great eternity that was so near and so real now, and it was full of brightness for him, full of peace and joy. He repeated over and over again with evident comfort, "'In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself: that where I am, there ye may be also." And to him nothing was so real as that truth, that he had a place prepared for him by that Saviour who had died for him, and that where his Saviour was there also would he be.

'He passed away quietly to his rest; and we laid him to sleep in a pretty country churchyard in his native town, not far from the old house, which seemed to have an attraction for me now that he was gone. But business pressed. Very soon now, and I should arrive at that point when, in fulfilment of the promise given to my guardian, I should have to relinquish my efforts, and let others reap the golden harvest which lay ripe and ready at my hand. With my books surrounding me one day, I was deep in calculations which seemed to show that my fixed limit had been reached, when an important telegram was put into my hand. It was an offer of business, which was far too tempting to be refused. I told my clerk to answer in the affirmative, and then, laying down my pen, I said within myself, "Thus far and no further!" I would stop now. With a deep sigh, half of sorrow, but wholly of relief, I gave myself up that night to other thoughts besides business. I began to feel deeper throbbings of my spiritual nature, and the old desires of my heart asserted themselves. I asked my Father in heaven that night to guide me—to keep me from repining—to make me strong in my desires to live now wholly for Him and for His glory and the calm repose of an untroubled heart brought refreshing sleep with it, such as I had not felt for years before. I rose later than usual, and when I arrived at my office found that important telegrams were awaiting me. panic had commenced such as would test the strongest houses in England. My venture of yesterday would prove a disastrous loss, and in connection with it there would be other liabilities of a very startling amount.

"Willis," I said to my managing man, "that transaction of yesterday will result in tremendous loss. I must not go a step further." 'He stood aghast.

"No, no!" I said, laughing. "It is all right so far. I am not about to stop payment; but instead of leaving business with a great fortune I shall only have enough to live upon."

"Has anything very unusual occurred to cause all this, sir?"

"Read these," I said, putting into his hand the telegrams I had just received, which told of failures which would paralyse the commercial world, and bring disaster in their train to hundreds of thousands in England.

"What do you mean to do, sir?" he inquired.

"Simply to pay my debts and retire from business."

"But would it not be wise to make an effort to recover your losses? There are many opportunities at a time like this."

"Willis, you are welcome to make the attempt for your own benefit if you wish. I shall leave you a certain sum to trade with, on the understanding that I have no further liability, and that my name does not appear; but I have done with business from this day forward."

'He was delighted with the proposal, which meant for him almost a certainty of fortune; and, as soon as I had made the necessary arrangements for carrying out my plans as speedily as possible, I drove home, with a deep sense of thankfulness that all my feverish desire for wealth was over, and that I might soon return to the quiet enjoyment of my early tastes.

"Well, nurse, I have news for you," I said, as she came in, as usual, to superintend my lonely dinner.

"News, Mr. Philip? You look as if some good news had cheered you up, for you are more like yourself than I have seen you for a long time."

"I am a poor man once more. A panic has come and swept away the greater portion of my large fortune."

"The Lord be praised!" she said, devoutly and thankfully.

"You appear actually pleased," I said.

- "I am, Mr. Philip—more pleased than I can tell you. Riches are no use in filling an empty heart. I never could understand our Lord's words at one time about the rich folks when He said, 'It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' But I think I have some notion of what it means now." And she said this with evident sincerity. "Are you going to give up this grand house, Mr. Philip?"
  - "I must—it has given me up."
- "And the fine horses and carriages and footmen, and the coming home late, and the worry and bother?"
  - "Yes, all these things, now, henceforth, and for ever."
- "Then I say Amen! or, in plain English, the sooner the better, Mr. Philip; for you would have been in your grave in a year or two longer, if you had continued to live as you have been lately."
  - "I think that is all your imagination, nurse."

"No, sir; it is what any one can see who cares to look; but you have been shutting your eyes to it all for a long time."

'I laughed at her old-fashioned care for me, and said, so as to comfort her mind, "Well, I am heartily glad it is all over, and that we can be the same quiet people that we once were; but I am glad my dear guardian did not live to see this day."

"Don't trouble yourself about what he would think, Mr. Philip. Often and often he has said to me, 'Mrs. Strong, I do hope our dear boy's heart is not getting too filled with the love of money. It is a dangerous thing; it is truly the root of all evil, and it would be terrible to think that he should let it master him."

"You and he were both right," I said, feeling the truth of the good woman's words; "but it is all over now."

"Yes, because God was good to you, and made it turn out just as He saw was right. You might have gone on for years, Mr. Philip."

'I was obliged to confess that even this view of the case was not so far from the truth, and that, if I had followed the dictates of my own desires, I should still have been the possessor of all those fine things which lay so heavily on Mrs. Strong's honest heart.

"How should you like to live in the country, nurse?" I inquired,

" Anywhere, Mr. Philip, out of this!"

"I ask you because I own an old-fashioned place in

—, which my dear guardian made me purchase because it was his native town."

"Then, Mr. Philip, we'll live there for his sake; it will feel homelike."

'And so, like a dream, there faded out of my life all that stir and business which had occupied my heart and head for twelve long years. My rich surroundings vanished as if they had never been. I moved into quiet lodgings whilst my large house was being disposed of, with all its wealth of furniture; but I carefully preserved every work of art or valuable record of former travels, so that in my new house I might surround myself with mementoes of my guardian's Indian life and my own travels. The old-fashioned house proved very comfortable when the alterations were made; and I endeavoured to preserve as much as possible its outward appearance, whilst making it fit for modern requirements within.

'It was delightful to sit in my comfortable library, surrounded by my favourite books and pictures, and resume the labours of my earlier days, with all the ripe experience of my business career to guide me in my work.

'I devoted the mornings to reading and writing, whilst in the evenings I endeavoured to seek out from among the poor those who needed help and guidance. This course of living was to many of my neighbours a mystery which they much desired to solve; they were at a loss to understand two old-fashioned people living in such a deserted house, and pursuing their way without consider-

ing what other people thought of them. The strangest stories possible began to be circulated about me; and my evening walks, which were sometimes to the calm church-yard where my guardian sleeps, were construed into the most ghost-like occupations. But I was indifferent to the wildest rumours that might be abroad, and was certainly not foolish enough to try to stop them. I soon found, however, that I had unconsciously made enemies in a quarter which I least expected, and where I wished to make friends. My efforts at conciliation only appeared to make matters worse, until at length it seemed as if, by wilful design, an injury was inflicted upon my property which roused me more than I care to confess, and decided me in endeavouring to discover the offenders, and bring the annoyance to an end.'

At this point in the reading Alec glanced at his audience, and saw that the effect of what he had just read in their ears was to make the boys look at one another with scared faces.

'If you will allow me,' he said, with a smile, 'I shall give place to one who will conclude the reading far better than I could, and who wants to speak a few words to you about himself.'

And so saying, Alec stepped from his reading-desk, and took his place amongst the awe-stricken audience.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECRET OUT.



ROM behind the curtain which concealed the reader from view there stepped a middle-aged man, who looked very much older than he really was. His hair was prematurely white, and his appearance more staid than his years seemed to justify; but there was a musical

sound in his voice, and a reassurance in his manner, that went far to allay what might otherwise have been something akin to a panic among the audience.

'My friend the reader has done me such good service that very little remains for me to say, except to tell you how heartily I desire that all unpleasantness between the boys of Highfield and myself should cease for ever. I have taken, perhaps, an unusual course to bring about this object; but I did so under legal advice, and am,

therefore, not wholly responsible for the result. I think I may say that I have now done all that lies in my power to bring about a reconciliation, and the rest must be yours to perform; but I have one word to say in conclusion. If there is among you one who feels specially responsible for any differences that may have existed between us, let him not fear to come forward and take the hand I proffer now, in token that the past is forgotten, and as a pledge of friendship in the future.'

For a moment there was painful stillness among the audience, and then Clement Brand, rising from his place with a crimson flush on his cheeks, came forward to where Mr. Blyth stood, and took the hand that was at once stretched out to welcome him.

'I think, sir, that I am responsible for what has occurred,' he said frankly; 'and I am very sorry for it.'

Mr. Blyth was about to reply, but such a ringing cheer rose from the boys that it was impossible for him to make himself heard until the applause subsided. Cries of 'Well done, Brand!' rose from several parts of the room, and the scene altogether was so novel and so touching that here and there it looked as if eyes were moistened by a sympathy they could not conceal.

At this point Mr. Verrinder came forward, and, raising his hand, obtained silence.

'Boys,' he said, 'I want to say a few words to you. You know that a reward of five pounds was intended to be offered for the discovery of the offender who injured

Mr. Blyth's property. Well, I think that the result of these readings has been more satisfactory than fifty times five pounds spent in anger could have been. We have seen to-night how powerful a weapon forgiveness is in the hands of a good man, and how love can work more wonders than law. You are one and all able to judge for yourselves in a matter of this sort, and I may venture the belief that this incident in your lives will not soon be forgotten. I want to give a direct bearing to the lesson this scene teaches us. You and I have to choose between law and love, and I see no reason why you should not make your choice to-night. I have Mr. Blyth's authority for saying that, although he was prepared to forgive fully and freely, as he has done, tonight, he was under no promise to forgive to-morrow; and you would have said that such a course was only just, and that to have refused his proffered forgiveness would have been foolish in the extreme. I know this argument commends itself, by the way you receive my words; and yet, although between man and man such a course is self-evident, there are many people who fail to see the strength of the argument as between God and man. I am not going to preach you a sermon, but just to point out one passage in the Bible which bears on the subject, and ask you to think of it as intelligent lads capable of judging between right and wrong-between wisdom and folly: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." My dear boys, you can have no real happiness in this life and certainly none in that which is to come, until you have peace with God, and that is to be had only by faith in our Saviour Jesus Christ; as the bearer away of your individual sins. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him.""

Mr. Blyth had a word to say to them before the meeting broke up.

'I have one request to make,' he said, 'and that is that those who are present to-night will do me the favour of spending the evening with me next Tuesday at my house, where I shall endeavour to illustrate much of what you have heard read here by interesting specimens and curiosities gathered from various parts of the globe. I shall expect you at half-past six, and I trust that not one will be absent.'

Another cheer, such as only boys can give, was the affirmative reply to Mr. Blyth's invitation. It would not be the fault of any person present if they happened to be absent, for the greatest possible desire was expressed to visit his house, and see for themselves so much that would throw light upon the strange history which had now closed.

And then the assembly dispersed, the boys going out in groups of threes and fours, talking and laughing together among themselves in a manner that showed how pleased they were with the result of the evening's reading. It was so unexpected and so delightful to think that after all Mr. Blyth should turn out to be the hero. He was just the man to have passed through strange experiences, and the mystery attaching to his life hitherto gave a reality to the story in their eyes.

When the house was cleared of its visitors, a family group gathered round the fire in Mr. Verrinder's parlour, and there was considerable mirth amongst them, for the events of the evening had been very gratifying to every person concerned. Mr. Blyth was one of the circle; but he had for some time ceased to be regarded as a visitor merely, and talked as freely as any member of the family.

'I feel to-night somewhat like a proud general who has carried a campaign to a successful termination, and who has made the enemy capitulate without shedding a drop of blood,' Mr. Verrinder said, smiling and addressing himself to Mr. Blyth.

'And I, sir, feel like a client who has won a suit by the clever advocacy of his counsel, to whom he owes a debt of gratitude which he can never discharge, answered Mr. Blyth, smiling and bowing, in reply to Mr. Verrinder's remarks.

James and Robert and John came round the fire, laughing and making merry over the success of the readings. Alec, as befitted one who had been successful, was modest

enough to leave it to others to speak of his efforts; but as every one's mind was filled with the subject, there was no reason to fear that he would lose his share of commendation.

Even Mr. Blyth himself could hardly believe in the reality of his position as the centre of a circle of merry boys. To suppose it possible that he could have succeeded in turning the tide of opinion so completely respecting his character in so short a time was almost beyond belief, and was only to be explained by the strange events that had been narrated during the readings.

But, strange as it appeared then, how much stranger was it on the following Tuesday, when his house was lit from garret to basement with a blaze of light such as the old windows had not revealed for many, many years! The foot-passengers whose way led them past the house about six o'clock that raw December evening, paused awhile to look in wonder at the strange sight that met their view. Merry boys, laughing and talking, arrived in numbers at the mysterious house, and, when the door was opened, it was plain to see that ample preparations had been made to receive them. As the boys entered the house, their curiosity was excited on all hands, for everywhere there were objects of interest to arrest them; and Mr. Blyth had taken care to have the attractions which his house contained arranged in the most effective manner. He was at the drawing-room door himself to receive the guests as they arrived; and, as each lad took his hand, there was something more than mere courtesy in the greeting, for it seemed as if the action had in it a suggestion of regret for the misunderstandings in the past, as well as a hearty friendliness in the present. Alec Verrinder and Clement Brand arrived together, and their appearance naturally created much interest. The boys declared that Clement Brand looked somewhat disconcerted, as indeed he may have done for the first moment or so, but it would have been impossible for him not to have entered into the spirit of Mr. Blyth's greeting.

'I am glad you have come in such good time,' said the host, shaking hands with them, 'for I am all alone at present, and I need assistance in looking after my guests. You will not mind taking the young people under your care as they arrive, and conducting them into the library, where they can amuse themselves until the whole company arrives? I must stay here to receive them.'

So the boys were at ease at once, and, having occupation, they made themselves most useful to Mr. Blyth in looking after his young guests. First of all there was a reunion of the boys and such other friends as had been invited in the library, where the old-fashioned wax candles had their light reflected in quaint mirrors on the walls, and where the youthful voices, mingling, made music such as had not been heard in that house for many generations. Then came the tea in the diningroom, where an ample repast was prepared, such as a football club would delight to attack, and such as it did attack with vigour and success, for the tables were toler-

ably relieved of their burdens before the boys left them. The library was the greatest attraction of the evening, for there Mr. Blyth's cases and specimens, and curiosities of all sorts, were displayed in bewildering variety; and there Mr. Blyth himself went from table to table explaining to the delighted groups all that he knew of his treasures. There was so much pleasant talk and pleasant laughter, so much wonder expressed here, and so much amusement there, that the time flew by, and the wonder seemed to be not how the evening could be employed, but how so many things could be exhibited and explained in so short a time.

In the midst of it all the library door opened, and a bronzed face appeared. When Mr. Blyth caught sight of it, he hurried forward with evident excitement to greet the pleasant-looking man who now entered laughing.

'Redfern!'

'Blyth!'

And for a few seconds they stood silent, looking at each other inquiringly. Mr. Blyth was the first to speak. 'When did you come? and why did you not let me know you were in England?'

'I came by the 6.15 from London, and I did not let you know because I only arrived to-day, and had the greatest difficulty in discovering where you had gone. Now it is my turn to inquire. What brought you here? and who are all these young gentlemen? Have you commenced a school?'

'These are my friends,' Mr. Blyth said, turning to the boys, who were looking on with evident interest, the name of Redfern having secured their attention. 'You have heard of Mr. Redfern,' he added.

'O yes, sir—the African missionary,' they answered.

'Really, Blyth, you astonish me. How can these gentlemen know anything of me?'

'It is a long story, but you shall hear it some day. Come now and have some refreshment.'

'I dined just before leaving London, so with your permission, and by right of my accomplishments as an African missionary, I shall turn to and be a boy just for the occasion. Nurse Strong has told me about your guardian,' he added thoughtfully. 'She is shedding tears of joy down-stairs at seeing me once more.'

'Just like her good and tender heart,' said Mr. Blyth.

Mr. Redfern divested himself of his greatcoat, and was soon with the boys, delighting them with stories of his adventures and experiences. It was pleasant to see how soon the lads became familiar with him, just as if they had known him for a considerable time, and as if his coming in as he did was a matter of no great surprise to them. Clement and Westrop and Alec were asking him questions about Africa, which, had they all been answered, would have kept them there until morning, and the other boys listened with great reverence, for they had heard enough about Mr. Redfern to make them regard him with great respect. At last Mr. Redfern asked Clement, with a good-humoured smile, 'What has brought you all here to-night?'

'Well, sir, we have come, of course, upon Mr. Blyth's invitation to spend the evening with him; but Verrinder here has been giving us readings about Mr. Blyth's early life and yours.'

'Mr. Blyth's early life and mine!' echoed Mr. Redfern, in astonishment. 'And what has he to tell you about me?'

'Oh, all sorts of things, sir! How you tossed him in the blanket, and how kind you were to him—'

'Truly a nice mixture! Blyth, I must know more about this,' he said, laughing, as Mr. Blyth came over to the party. 'This young gentleman tells me first that some one has been giving readings about your life and mine, and how I tossed you in a blanket, and how kind I was to you. I want to hear more.'

'You must begin at the beginning; and, since Mr. Brand has commenced, he shall also finish the narrative; but, before he tells you anything further, I must ask as a favour that you all come with me and examine a few more of my curiosities, after which you shall be at liberty to hear the story.'

And so saying, the group was broken up, and Mr. Blyth led them to the other end of the room, where several cases remained unexamined.

To his descriptions Mr. Redfern was able to add much that was new and interesting, both from his own observation and from hearing facts from other travellers he had met.

'I have kept my chief favourite for the last,' Mr.

Blyth said; and the lads looked round in wonder, for they thought by this time they had exhausted the curiosities. Mr. Blyth carefully closed the cabinets he had been exhibiting, and then saying, 'Come with me,' he walked across the room towards where a curtain hung against the wall.

When Mr. Blyth drew aside the heavy curtain which hid the entrance to the conservatory, and the boys looked in with wonder and delight at the fairy-like prospect of palms and ferns and all manner of rare plants lit up by innumerable lamps concealed in the foliage, their admiration was unbounded. The plashing of the little fountain was refreshing after the warm rooms, and the boys went in to enjoy the cool atmosphere, and examine the plants and flowers, that looked almost more beautiful by night than by day.

As they walked round the conservatory, they were all attracted to one case, which seemed, from the interest manifested in its contents, to be particularly curious and valuable. A short account of the nature of the specimen was neatly placed immediately in front of where it stood, and, as the boys stooped down to read it, they found it run thus:

THIS BALL FELL HERE, OCTOBER 9, 18-

A whispered exclamation from the boys, and they passed on in silence, the sight of the ball having recalled to every mind an incident in their lives which they would gladly have forgotten. To Clement Brand especially it was very painful, not alone because it was there

to remind him of his folly, but also because it would remain there always as a memento of an act which he sincerely regretted. A feeling of bitterness and disappointment flashed across his mind; as it did so, a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

'Clement, you must do me a favour to-night,' said Mr. Blyth. 'I placed that ball where you see it, so that it might be a continual witness to an injury; but the breach which it made has been healed in every sense of the word, and I want you now to remove it with your own hand, in witness of the fact that the deed is forgiven, and must never again disturb your heart or mine.'

Clement removed the ball from its place with a smile, and then, turning to Mr. Blyth, said, 'I shall keep it, sir, to remind me of my own stupid folly and your unmerited forgiveness.'

At which speech the boys gave three cheers, and then went home, declaring that Mr. Blyth had proved himself to be a hero indeed, and that all they could either do or say would not express half what they felt at his generous conduct.

He had fought a hero's battle, and gained a hero's victory, for 'he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.'

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